

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE AS A PRODUCT OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Case Study of a Finnish Retail Company

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Abstract

For the past recent years, there has been discussion about the “war of talent” in the labour market. It refers to a situation where employers face challenges in attracting talents to work for them and later in retaining them. Therefore, employers need increasingly to stand out among other employers and employee experience has been identified as a possible solution for this challenge. Internal communication in turn, is an essential part of work in every organization and it can influence the way how employees perceive the employer. Hence, can be assumed that internal communication influences also the employee experience.

This thesis was conducted as a single case study for a case company, which is a large, Finnish company operating in retail business. The objective of this study was to investigate whether and how internal communication can influence employee experience. Employee experience has been identified as a notion, which can be perceived in many different ways. Hence, there was first a need to explore what it means specifically for the employees in the case company and how do they experience working in the case company. From the internal communication areas this study focuses on internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication, as those two can be strategically managed by the company. The used data of this study is collected by interviewing case company employees from different positions and business areas.

Findings of this study demonstrate that employee experience consists of social, physical and employee's personal conditions. More specifically, the conditions include organizational culture and community, values, supportive and guiding managers, facilitating premises, meaningful work with development opportunities and holistic work wellbeing. All above mentioned elements are influenced by internal communication and the employee experience can be improved through internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication. In particular, both ICC and internal line manager communication should be viewed as complementing each other. In terms of internal communication, positive employee experience can be achieved, when the employee receives enough information in order to perform his or her work and to satisfy the curiosity, gets inspired by the ICC messages, has a trust-based relationship with his or her line manager and is led through effective line manager communication.

Keywords employee experience, internal communication, line manager communication, internal corporate communication, strategy communication, corporate culture, employer branding

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Tiivistelmä

Työmarkkinoilla on muutaman viimeisen vuoden ajan puhuttu ”talenttien sodasta” eli tilanteesta, jossa työnantajat kohtaavat haasteita löytää kyvykkäitä työntekijöitä sekä myöhemmin saada heitä pysymään palveluksessaan. Tästä syystä työnantajilla on tarve erottua muiden työnantajien joukosta ja yhdeksi ratkaisuksi haasteeseen on tunnistettu työntekijäkokemukseen panostaminen. Sisäisellä viestinnällä voidaan puolestaan vaikuttaa siihen, miten työntekijät näkevät työnantajayrityksensä. Työntekijäkokemus on käsitteenä kuitenkin vasta hiljattain kehittynyt, eikä se ole vielä vakiintunut akateemisessa tutkimuksessa, mistä syystä sen yhteyttä yrityksen sisäiseen viestintään ei ole vielä tutkittu.

Tämä tutkimus toteutettu laadullisena case-tutkimuksena suurelle suomalaiselle kaupan alan yritykselle. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, voidaanko yrityksen sisäisellä viestinnällä vaikuttaa työntekijäkokemukseen ja millä keinoin. Työntekijäkokemus on tunnistettu käsitteeksi, joka voidaan kokea monella eri tavalla, mistä syystä tutkimuksessa hahmotetaan ensin kuva siitä, mitä työntekijäkokemus merkitsee juuri case-yrityksen työntekijöille ja kuinka he kokevat case-yrityksessä työskentelyn. Sisäisen viestinnän keinoista tämä tutkimus keskittyy sisäiseen yritysviestintään sekä esimies-alaisviestintään. Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty haastattelemalla case-yrityksen työntekijöitä ympäri organisaatiota.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että työntekijäkokemus case-yrityksessä koostuu kolmenlaisista, sosiaalisista, fyysisistä sekä työntekijäkohtaisista tekijöistä. Näihin tekijöihin lukeutuvat kulttuuri ja yhteisö, arvopohjainen organisaatio, tukeva ja ohjaava esimies, työntekoa fasilitoivat työtilat- ja välineet, motivoiva työ kehitysmahdollisuuksilla sekä kokonaisvaltainen työhyvinvointi. Yrityksen sisäinen viestintä liittyy vahvasti kaikkiin edellä mainittuihin tekijöihin ja sekä sisäisellä yritysviestinnällä että esimies-alaisviestinnällä pystytään vahvistamaan työntekijäkokemusta kyseisten tekijöiden kautta. Sisäinen yritysviestintä ja esimies-alaisviestintä tulisikin nähdä toisiaan täydentävinä sisäisen viestinnän muotoina. Sisäisen viestinnän näkökulmasta työntekijäkokemusta voidaan parantaa tarjoamalla työntekijälle tarpeeksi tietoa hänen työnsä suorittamista sekä tiedonjonon tyydyttämistä varten, inspiroimalla työntekijää sisäisen yritysviestinnän avulla, luottamukseen perustuvalla esimies-alaisuhteella sekä tehokkaaseen viestintään perustuvalla johtamisella.

Avainsanat työntekijäkokemus, sisäinen viestintä, esimies-alaisviestintä, sisäinen yritysviestintä, strategiaviestintä, yrityskulttuuri, työnantajamielikuva

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Conducting this study has not been a piece of cake for me, but I believe it is true that the bigger the challenge, the more it rewards afterwards. It has been insightful and interesting to focus on this particular topic so intensively and specially to study employee experience, which personally fascinates me a lot. In addition, I feel that along this thesis I have gained confidence concerning my future career plans and professional goals that I want to achieve.

I am grateful that I was able to conduct this study for the specific case company. I would like to say thank you to all the wonderful employees, whom I got to interview and who enabled me to complete this thesis. From the university, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Pekka Pälli for providing me his support and valuable insights whenever I needed. All my family, lovely friends and others who have stood by me during my studies and this thesis process – a big thank you! Especially LUT-girls, you are pure gold! And lastly, Tom – million thanks to you for supporting and cheering me up, especially on the hardest days. You are simply the best.

Helsinki, November 2019

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1 INTRODUCTION

Discussing with any HR professional about recruiting or retaining employees, a notion of “war of talent” will sooner or later emerge. According to Rasca (2018), the “war of talent” refer to a situation where organizations need talent but there are not enough of them in the labour market which makes it essential for companies to retain the talents already working for them. Rasca (2018) identifies employee experience as a potential answer for the deficit of talents. Employee experience can be described in many ways but according to Plaskoff (2017) it means “the employee’s holistic perceptions of the relationship with his/her employing organization derived from all the encounters at touchpoints along the employee’s journey”. By concentrating on the creation of excellent employee experiences, organizations can stand out among other employers since employees tend to spread word-of-mouth of their employee experiences to their social networks and nowadays especially to different social media platforms. Moreover, when existing employees experience their work and their employer positively, they are more likely to retain in their position or continue their career in other positions within the organization.

The reason why employee experience can be perceived as a weapon in the “war of talent”, is that through investing in the creation of employee experiences, organizations can improve their employer brand in the eyes of their current employees and potential future employees assuming that employees share their experiences. Employee’s subjective and holistic experience of the work naturally influences the way in which employee thinks about the employer. Ambler and Barrow (1996, 187) define employer branding as “the functional, economic, and psychological benefits that are provided by employment and identified with the employing company”. Later on, Barrow and Mosley (2011) have identified employer branding to reflect organization’s reputation as an employer and its value proposition for its employees. Lloyd (2002, 65) associates employer branding with communication by suggesting that employer branding means a “sum of a company’s efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work”.

Why employer branding and employee experience are so tightly linked to each other, is the fact that communicating an employer brand which is not based on the reality, is not very far-reaching from an organization. The employer brand that a company communicates, must correspond with the real employee experiences that employees working for the company have.

Hence, given the concern of “war of talent” and deriving from Lloyd’s (2002) definition of employer branding, communication is an essential part of employer branding and the creation of employee experiences. According to Cornelissen (2014, 3), the core task of corporate communication is “building, maintaining and protecting the company’s reputation”. When the objective is to influence company’s reputation in the eyes of company’s internal stakeholders, employees, it is internal communication that companies should invest in. Internal communication is one discipline of corporate communication, targeted to communicating with employees.

Traditionally employees have been conceived as a production force of an organization who contribute to the performance and profitability. A more recent perception is that employees represent their organization as corporate ambassadors and brand advocates to the external stakeholders, including customers and stockholders in various communication channels. (Men, 2014) Hence, companies should invest in their communication with employees, who can in turn cultivate organizational messages outside the company and for example protect and enhance the organization’s reputation among customers and potential job seekers.

Nowadays, owing to the development of digital solutions and high degree of connectivity, sharing employee experiences and opinions about employers is easier and more transparent than ever. Years back, the reach of “word-of-mouth” (WOM) was much more narrow restricting to peers and relatives but in the era of social media, WOM can quickly reach the whole world. Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba (2017, 198) highlight that during the last few years, employer branding has increased its significance due to the employment stories brought up by the technological advancements. Shared employment stories ultimately reflect the employee experiences built up in a specific company which are more visible than ever. Consequently, the employment stories can influence the company’s reputation as an employer, i.e. the employer brand.

The scholarly discussion around employee experience has emerged rather recently. Hence, previous research of employee experience remains minor and the topic has been covered more in the business world among consultancy agencies and other multinational companies, such as Deloitte and IBM rather than in academia. Neither the connection between employee experience and internal communication has been studied and therefore there is a gap in the

literature. Employee engagement, which is often related to employee experience, is yet much more studied as a concept than employee experience. However, the concepts should not be mixed with each other. Saks (2006, 602) defines employee engagement as “the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles”. The relationship between internal corporate communication and employee engagement has been studied extensively (e. g. Karanges et al., 2015; Tkalac Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2017) whereas the similar connection with employee experience remains more indefinite and calls for investigation.

1.1 Research objectives and questions

The objective of this study is to examine whether and how internal communication can influence and support employee experiences among the organization. The study is an empirical case study focusing on employee experiences and internal communication in a large Finnish case company operating in retail business. Case company is remained as anonymous in this study for the sake of dealing with internal and partly sensitive issues.

The study specifically aims to produce practical value for evaluating and improving the internal communication in order to support and enhance employee experiences in the case company. Internal communication is in this study seen as something that the organization’s management can tactically influence. Thus, the research purpose is also to find recommendations for the case company management, HR and communications departments as regards the internal communication and employee experiences.

Research objectives are accomplished by reviewing case company’s representatives’ perceptions of employee experience and internal communication and the linkage between aforementioned concepts. Since the purpose is to draw a comprehensive view representing the whole case company, the chosen sample of interviewees represents different professional groups in the organization. The interviewees have diverse professional backgrounds and job roles, ranging from HR and communications to other business areas and positions inside the company. HR and communications representatives were also asked about practical execution and objectives of internal communication keeping in mind the creation of employee experiences as the aim is to investigate the understanding of employee experience and current experiences

of internal communication and find ideas for improving the practices of organizational communication to enhance employee experience. The objective of this study is divided into two research questions; one main research question and one sub-research question. The research questions are as following:

MRQ. How can internal communication influence employee experiences?

SRQ. What is the understanding of employee experience in the case company?

The main research question studies whether it is possible to influence employee experiences by the internal communication and further on the possible ways in which internal communication can support employee experiences in the case company. The main research question is supported by the sub-research question in order to comprehensively answer to the main research question and to achieve the goals of this research. The sub-research question aims to specify the notion of employee experience and to identify the elements of which employee experience constitutes specifically in the case company. Employee experience can mean different things in different organizational contexts and therefore it is essential to capture what it means in the context of the case company in order to further investigate how those employee experiences could be influenced through internal communication (Morgan, 2017).

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. In this introductory chapter, I have presented the background for this thesis and defined the objectives and research questions of this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a literature review, which consists of existing literature regarding the main concepts of this thesis: employee experience and internal communication. Chapter 3 is a methodology chapter, which elaborates the methodological choices of this study including the research method, data collection methods and data analysis practices. Also, trustworthiness of the study is discussed in chapter 3. In chapter 4, I will present the findings from my interview data. In the concluding section, chapter 5, in addition to summarizing and discussing the main findings, I will reflect on the findings in light of prior literature and research objectives of this study. Finally, I will present managerial implications for the case company as well as suggest some areas for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this study consists of two distinct parts. The first part presents the concept of employee experience, its background and some related concepts, such as employee engagement. Moreover, employee experience is conceptualized and further linked to communication. Due to the novelty of employee experience as a concept, the literature used is mostly non-academic and recently published. The second part of the literature review concerns corporate communication and more specifically internal communication and its dimensions and channels.

2.1 Employee experience

In order to conceptualize the term employee experience, the term experience should be defined first. In this thesis, experience is captured as “the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality” which is “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Green (2017, 4) suggests that “what is happening inside every organization is some type of employee experience”, depicting rather accurately the challenges in defining the concept of employee experience precisely. Deloitte (2017) particularizes the concept by suggesting that employees “look at everything that happens at work as an integrated experience that impacts daily life in and outside the workplace, including overall physical, emotional, professional, and financial well-being”.

The scholarly discussion around employee experience has emerged rather recently which largely explains the minor amount of scholarly research around employee experience as well as the lack of academic definitions. The topic has been covered more in the business world among consultancy agencies rather than in academia and consequently number of consultancy agencies and practitioners in business have defined employee experience in various means. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that employee experience is not, at least yet, an established term and as the following definitions indicate, it can be defined in multiple different ways. Table 1 presents different definitions for the term both from academia and practitioners.

Source	Definition
Plaskoff (2017)	“the employee’s holistic perceptions of the relationship with his/her employing organization derived from all the encounters at touchpoints along the employee’s journey”
Dery & Sebastian (2017)	“the work complexity and behavioural norms that influence employee’s ability to create value”
Morgan (2017)	“the intersection of employee’s expectations, needs, and wants and the organizational design of those expectations, needs, and wants”
Deloitte (2017)	“a holistic view of life at work, requiring constant feedback, action, and monitoring”
Larivière et al. (2017)	“the totality of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial and social responses that result from interactions with other parties (e.g., customers, and technology)”
Maylett & Wride (2017)	“the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work”

Table 1. Definitions for employee experience

In order to conceptualize this rather recently emerged notion of employee experience, the presented definitions are analysed, and four different common themes (Figure 1) are identified based on the analysis.



Figure 1. Employee experience conceptualization

Employee experience is a **holistic** notion and merely a sum of different observations and feelings than a one piece of experience. Employee experience consists of multiple feelings, interactions, expectations and desires. Plaskoff (2017) argues that the relationship between employee and employer begins already before signing the employment contract and it remains after employee leaves the company. Therefore, the experience should be seen as a whole and not just as separate events. Larivière et al. (2017) take into account the holisticity by suggesting that employee experience includes “cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial and social responses”.

Employee experience is always a **personal** experience even though it is constituted in and through social interactions. Maylett and Wride (2017) and Plaskoff (2017) define employee experience as employee’s perceptions, which are always made by the employee oneself. Employees have their own needs, wants and expectations towards their work which are then reflected to the organizational design of those needs, wants and expectations (Morgan, 2017).

Company specificity is characteristic for employee experience. Employee experience can mean different things depending on the organization, but it is always built in the relationship between employee and employer (Plaskoff, 2017). The organization itself as well as other employees in the organization affect to the employee experience of an individual employee.

Employee experience is influenced by the **social** interactions within an organization (Larivière et al., 2017; Maylett & Wride, 2017). Organizations constitute of communication between different stakeholders, such as customers and also technology (Larivière et al., 2017) and therefore communication is an essential part of forming employee experience. Moreover, relationships, feedback and behavioural norms are all social aspects inside organizations.

Deriving from the presented definitions and reflecting to the common features of those definitions, in this thesis employee experience is defined as follows:

Employee experience is a sum of employee’s individual perceptions of working in a specific organization throughout the employment including all interactions within the organization.

2.1.1 The emergence of employee experience

Employee experience, as it is currently holistically perceived, has risen and revolutionized the discussions among HR professionals during the last couple of years. Since then, numerous companies have established programmes and concepts aiming to improve employee experiences as well as set focusing on employee experience as strategic objectives. Some companies have even hired chief employee experience officers (CEEEO) to take responsibility of all the aspects related to employee experience. CEEEO position was first introduced in 2015 by AirBnB, when HR director Mark Levy rebranded his role to employee experience chief (Ranosa, 2018). However, in order to understand the emergence of the concept, we must look way back to the history.

More than 20 years ago, Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced a concept of “experience economy”, where consumers do not anymore seek for commodities, products or services but merely experiences, which companies are increasingly designing and promoting to them. Consequently, customer experience started to gain attention among the scholars and practitioners as it was perceived as a strategic practice to create value for company’s customers, to differentiate and to achieve sustainable competitive advantage prior to rivals (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009) Meyer and Schwager (2007) define customer experience as “the subjective response customers have to direct or indirect contact with a company”, which “is shaped by customers' expectations, which largely reflect previous experiences”.

Since then, customer experience has been a permanent topic in the discussions of firms gaining competitive advantage (Jain, Aagja & Bagdare, 2017) but lately the discussion has turned to focus on employee experience instead. In designing customer experiences, there has been a shift from inside-out thinking towards outside-in thinking, in which the company puts itself to the shoes of customers aiming to understand the real needs and wants of the customer (Manning, Bodine, Bernoff, 2012; Plaskoff, 2017). The same principle can be applied in designing employee experiences, where the employees’ needs and experiences are preferred and the work is perceived as a journey and employee as a hero (Plaskoff, 2017). Maylett and Wride (2017) connect employee and customer experiences by formulating a “law of congruent experience” which demonstrates that “employees will deliver a customer experience that matches their own experience in the organization”. Yet, companies inevitably need employees in order to create

customer experiences and whether the employees do not feel positively about their work, the feeling will potentially influence the way they serve the customers. Furthermore, Carney (2018) suggests that “customer experience” mentality should be implemented in managing employees as a sign that they are taken care of.

It is not coincidence that employee experience has started to gain attention during past few years when the companies are increasingly struggling with finding and retaining skilled workforce in the war of talent. Rasca (2018) has studied the background of the embrace of employee experience which strongly lies in the changes of labour market. Technological advancements have led to the creation of new types of work and simultaneously other types of work have started to disappear. Meanwhile companies seek new types of skills from the employees: entrepreneurial and change mindset as well as innovativeness, which are all hard to find. (Rasca, 2018.) In similar vein, Morgan (2017) has identified several reasons for the emerge of employee experience, including poor success with the concept of employee engagement, the war of talent, technological advancement, alternative work arrangements, the gig economy and the transparency of work and company evaluations. Indeed, especially considering the war of talent, companies cannot afford to ignore the importance of employee experience as it influences directly employee’s satisfaction, engagement, commitment and also performance (Plaskoff, 2017). Consequently, the aforementioned turning point in the labour market has forced companies to find means to solve the challenging situation internally.

The increased interest towards employee experience is justifiable due to the shift in the generations of workforce. Millennials, meaning employees born between early 1980’s and mid-1990’s, are dominating the labour market and by 2020, they will represent more than 75 percent of the total workforce (Minahan, 2014). Expectations of work among the millennials, which strongly differ from the expectations of their predecessors are remarkable in this shift of generations. Millennials tend to value the individualistic aspects of work, including rapid career development and advancement of new skills yet valuing meaningful and satisfactory life outside the work (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010). Work is generally less central in Millennials’ lives and their work ethic is found to be lower than previous generations’ and in order for companies to retain Millennials, they should be given flexibility, time off work and possibly other leisure benefits (Twenge, 2010). These expectations set challenges for companies and especially to HR

function in designing the work, working conditions and employee experience in order to attract, retain and motivate millennial employees.

In addition, in this thesis employee experience is considered as a mean of influencing employer branding and as something that company's management can influence. As discussed earlier, employees are able to spread their personal employee experience through WOM, which nowadays is not only restricted to family and friends but can easily reach the whole world through social media channels. If the employee experience is positive and an employee starts telling the experience forwards, it can support the employer brand of the organization. Besides the wide circulation of WOM, employee voice is considered as a trustful source of information. According to Sundberg and Donkon (2017), 70 percent of adults trust their peer referrals whereas only 15 percent trust the social media posts made by organizations themselves.

2.1.2 Elements shaping employee experience

As discovered in section 2.1, employee experience can be perceived in various ways. Consequently, there are different understandings of what elements actually influence to employee experience and where it can be derived from. In this section, different understandings of employee experience constituents are presented and discussed.

After analysing data from hundreds of organizations, Morgan (2017) created a framework, where employee experience begins from a 'reason for being'. That is, an answer to question "What impact does the organization have on the world and on the community around it?". In order to create outstanding employee experiences, that 'reason for being' should inspire employees and encourage them to work. Moreover, it should be unattainable and focus on the organization's impact on world and people instead of financial performance. Beginning from the 'reason for being' Morgan's (2017) framework goes ahead in recognizing three different environments for employee experience: physical, technical and cultural. The physical environment refers to the premises, where employee performs his or her job and it is estimated to cover up to 30% of the employee experience in total. The technological environment in turn includes all hardware, software and applications used for working. Lastly, cultural environment consists of the overall feeling inside the organization and the actions that are taken to create the culture. (Morgan, 2017)

Plaskoff (2017) takes a design-centred approach to conceptualize employee experience constituents as he divides the employee's journey, the pathway in the company, to different stages: pre-employment, employment and post-employment. Employee experience is seen as a totality of all touchpoints between the employee and employer during that employee journey. Unlike in Morgan's (2017) framework, Plaskoff (2017) argues that the touchpoints include interactions with the organizational culture as well as interactions outside the organization (for example discussions with family and former employees and media reactions). According to Plaskoff (2017), organizational culture includes everything that an employee can interact with within the company, including physical and technical environments. Furthermore, when designing employee experience, Plaskoff (2017) suggests that employee should be looked at from several perspectives: cognitively, emotionally, socially, politically, economically and physically. When combining these different perspectives of employee with Morgan's (2017) 'reason for being', it can be argued that companies should design their compelling answer for employees' 'reason for being' from all of these perspectives and in order to attract employee cognitively, emotionally, socially, politically, economically and physically. (Plaskoff, 2017)

A third approach to employee experience, proposed by Maylett and Wride (2017), assumes that employee experience is a combination of expectations, perceptions and experiences. Employee has a certain set of expectations towards working in an organization which are then reflected to the perceptions of his or her experiences. Maylett and Wride (2017) name the intersection of expectations and actual experiences as an expectation gap. The positivity of the employee experience is then dependent on the match between those expectations and perceptions of experiences. (Maylett & Wride, 2017) Also Morgan (2017) has identified that employee experience is built on expectations and his framework suggests that employee experience is based on the intersection of employee's own expectations and the organization's assumed expectations for employees.

Maylett and Wride (2017) further suggest that employee's expectations towards their work and employer originate from three different contracts between the employee and employer: brand contract, transactional contract and psychological contract. Those contracts define the relationship between the employee and employer and ultimately the actual employee experience. The brand contract refers to the promises that an organization creates through its culture, marketing and PR and basically means the "public face" of an organization.

Specifically, in attracting potential new employees, the brand contract plays an important role. Whereas the brand contract is merely based on mental images, the transactional contract is more concrete and intentional. Between an employee and employer, it means mutually accepted and written operating terms and conditions of the employment: what is expected from the employee and what s/he will receive in turn from the employer. The third contract, psychological contract, is an unwritten set of expectations which employee forms concerning the rights and responsibilities of the employment. The psychological contract defines the terms of exchange between employee and employer and, as Maylett and Wride (2017) maintain, it has the biggest potential to influence employee experience.

2.1.3 Related Concepts

Given the novelty of employee experience as a concept and its varying definitions, employee experience is often mixed with other concepts that include similar elements to employee experience. In this sub-section, those related concepts, which are also more traditional and have longer history in the academic research, are presented and distinguished from the concept of employee experience. Moreover, this sub-section accentuates why organizations should focus on employee experiences instead of these related concepts mainly due to its holistic approach to employee's perceptions of work.

Employee engagement

As already identified in the introduction, employee experience is often related to and mixed with employee engagement, a concept introduced approximately ten years prior to employee experience. Saks (2006, 602) defines employee engagement as “the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles”. Heger (2007), in turn, argues that employee engagement is affected by employee's rational thinking and emotional feeling about the work and organization. How employee thinks and feels about the organization, stems from the overall employee experience that employee has when working in the organization (Plaskoff, 2017). Therefore, employee engagement can be perceived as a consequence of employee experience. Finally, Morgan (2017) argues that one of the main reasons why organizations have started to focus on employee experiences instead of employee engagement is the “poor success” of employee engagement approach. According to Morgan

(2017), the reason for poor success is caused by the fact that engagement measures the result instead of the reasons why employee feels certain way.

The connection between internal corporate communication and employee engagement has been studied extensively whereas the similar connection with employee experience remains more indefinite. Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014) found out in their study that effective internal communication that aims to build trust between employee and employer can increase employee engagement. Particularly they highlight the importance of face-to-face communication in trust building and achieving engagement.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction implies employee's satisfaction with work and the organizational context where employee is working (Jernigan et al., 2002). Kersley et al. (2006) suggest that job satisfaction originates from employee's experiences of the work situation, physical working environment, employment terms and conditions and the extent of autonomy, responsibility, authority and empowerment employee gets from the employer. As a concept, job satisfaction is more simplified than employee experience, as it rather straight-forwardly implicates that employee is either satisfied or non-satisfied with one's job. In comparison, employee experience as a term is more complex and it acknowledges that employee's experience can consist of multiple observations and perceptions, both positive and negative. Thus, it is not meaningful to express only as satisfaction or non-satisfaction.

Work wellbeing

All the time more and more demanding work life has increased the worries towards employees' work wellbeing already for a few decades. Work wellbeing can be seen as employee's physical and mental health at work, that constitutes of employee commitment, job satisfaction and the feeling of work-life balance (Currie, 2001; Baptiste, 2008). Baptiste (2008) supplements this by noting that the working environment should be stress-free and offer physically safe conditions for employees to perform their work. Therefore, for the perk of both organization and the employees, organizations should support their employees' holistic wellbeing by providing an environment promoting satisfaction and enabling employees to succeed and reach their potential (Tehrani et al., 2007). Employee experience is a broader concept than work

wellbeing, since it observes employee's touchpoint with the organization not only from the health perspective.

Employee value proposition

Employee value proposition (EVP) is tightly linked to employer branding and it refers to “creating a balance between employee's job satisfaction and performance of the employee in work culture” (Goswami, 2015). Evans, Pucik and Björkman (2010) formulate the same idea as a balance of what employee “gives up” and on the other hand what employee “gets”. What employee “gives up” borrows the mentality of an opportunity cost. When employee works, he or she gives up something else, for example time with family and friends or time invested in hobbies or education. In turn, employee “gets” something offered by the company. This “get” side includes four elements: rewards including salary, benefits and career development, attributes of job such as autonomy and learning opportunities, features of the company including its culture and values and ultimately leadership attributes. (Evans, Pucik & Björkman, 2010) Unlike employee experience, EVP is something that organizations can themselves define and communicate internally and externally. However, EVP should ideally match with employees' personal employee experiences.

2.2 Internal communication

In order to build a thorough view of internal communication as a management function, literature of corporate communication and internal communication is reviewed. Corporate communication is a broad concept including various types of communication targeted to different audiences of the organization. Van Riel (1995, 26) defines corporate communication as “an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible”. Also Cornelissen (2014) associates corporate communication with management by suggesting corporate communication a role as management function and an objective of coordinating both internal and external communication in order to establish and maintain organization's reputation with different stakeholders. What is typical for corporate communication, is that it ties branding, media relations, investor relations, internal communication and public affairs together and views the organization as a whole (Cornelissen, 2014).

Internal communication is one discipline under corporate communication, focusing on the communication with a specific group of organization's stakeholders; its employees. Cornelissen (2014, 164) uses a simple and a very broad definition for internal communication by suggesting that it refers to "communication with employees internal to the organization". Another commonly used definition for internal communication is provided by Frank and Brownell (1989, 5-6) that is "the communications transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialisation that are intended to design and redesign organisations, to implement designs, and to co-ordinate day-to-day activities". This definition captures the multidimensionality of internal communication by suggesting that it occurs to different directions and at different levels and areas of organizations. While Cornelissen's (2014) definition does not specify the objectives of internal communication, it similarly includes a possibility for communication appearing at different levels and directions.

However, a third definition is chosen for this thesis as it is more suitable for the perspective of this thesis. In this thesis, internal communication is defined as Welch and Jackson (2007) suggest, "the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations across a number of interrelated dimensions including, internal line manager communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication", since the aim is to study whether and how organizations can influence the employee experiences through internal communication. This definition addresses the managerial function of internal communication, which is essential for this thesis, but at the same time identifies multiple dimensions of communication, which are not all possible to strategically manage (for example internal team peer communication). The different dimensions of internal communication identified in the definition, are introduced later in this section.

Two distinctive goals have been identified for internal communication. The first goal is to inform the employees about their work tasks, policies and other matters of the organization. The second goal refers to creating a community within the organization. (Francis, 1989; De Ridder, 2003) The first goal relates necessarily to performing the daily tasks at work and the second goal is more related to socializing and building an organizational culture. Internal communication has been identified as crucial for organizations to succeed in their operations (e. g. Welch & Jackson, 2007). Referring to the definition of internal communication by Frank

and Brownell (1989), the success of organizations is dependent on the communication of both change situations and day-to-day work activities. Robertson (2005) in turn argues that an effective communication climate in organizational context is based on four different topics; job, personal, operational and strategic issues. In the light of these arguments, internal communication serves multiple purposes within the organization and it is crucial for both success of the firm as well as for the atmosphere and culture inside the firm.

The importance of internal communication is justifiable as it influences organizations and employees in numerous ways. It has been recognized that internal communication can make employees more committed to their work through involving two-way communication, employees' participation in decision-making processes and the ability to control work life (Cornelissen, 2014). Commitment in turn, boosts employees towards better performance (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In particular, performance can be improved through communicating effectively the organizational roles and responsibilities to the employees (Benner & Tushman, 2003). Moreover, internal communication has been recognized to affect to employee engagement (e. g. Kress, 2005; Saks, 2006) and increase the level of trust between employees and managers (Gavin & Mayer, 2005). Internal communication from the supervisor or top management and the amount of received information about relevant topics concerning work have been recognized as the most important predictors of job satisfaction (Goldhaber et al. 1978). Internal communication influences the bottom line of organizations through increased productivity and profitability (Mishra, Boynton, Mishra, 2014) as well as it can enhance the organization's reputation when the employees are able to act as organizational advocates towards the customers (Gronstedt, 2000). Ultimately, it can be concluded that internal communication can lead organizations to success (Argenti & Forman, 2002).

Also practitioners have found remarkable effects of internal communication. Watson Wyatt Worldwide studies in years 2003 and 2005, presented by Yates (2006), demonstrate that effective internal communication practices ultimately result in superior financial performance through greater employee commitment and engagement. Through employee commitment and engagement, employees tend to retain longer in the companies and their productivity is higher. Retaining productive employees may improve the financial performance, which means higher returns to company's shareholders and increased market premium. (Yates, 2006) The results of the studies are presented in figure 2, which is supplemented with the concept of employee

experience for the purpose of this study. As earlier discussed, employee experience has been suggested to positively influence employee engagement and hence it is assumed to be placed between effective communication practices and greater employee commitment and engagement in the process of influencing the financial performance by internal communication.

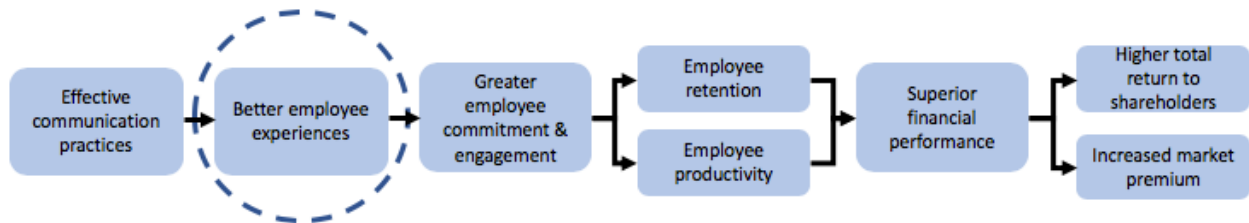


Figure 2. Communication effectiveness drives superior financial performance (modified and supplemented from Yates, 2006)

2.2.1 Internal communication matrix

As corporate communication, also internal communication can be conceived as an umbrella term but covering different types of communication targeted to employees inside an organization. Cornelissen (2014) separates two central areas of internal communication: management communication, and corporate information and communication systems (CICS). Management communication consists of communication between a manager and subordinate mostly associated with the tasks of an employee and their morale or wellbeing related matters. Even though internal communication is often perceived as a responsibility of communication function, management communication is handled by the managers themselves, although often supported by the communication professionals. CICS in turn, is a broader area of internal communication covering the technologies and communication systems used in spreading corporate level information and decisions to the employees. Communication function is most often responsible for CICS. (Cornelissen, 2014)

As identified, internal communication occurs within the organizations at different levels and between different parties. Different parties in organizations can be approached as stakeholders. Freeman (1984) identifies several internal stakeholders in organizations, including line management, team members, and other internal groups such as related departments and

subsidiary managers. Welch and Jackson (2007) supplement the stakeholder classification by suggesting five stakeholder groups: all employees, strategic management, day-to-day management, work teams and project teams. Based on the classification, Welch and Jackson (2007) distinguish communication at different levels by suggesting an internal communication matrix including four interrelated dimensions of internal communication: internal line manager communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication. In this thesis, internal line manager communication and internal corporate communication are equal to Cornelissen's (2014) management communication and corporate information and communication systems (CICS). However, this four-dimension classification completes Cornelissen's (2014) division, as the employees are in this matrix more strongly included as active participants in internal communication in the dimensions of internal team peer communication and internal project peer communication. Features of these four dimensions of internal communication are presented in table 2.

Dimension	Level	Direction	Participants	Content
Internal line manager communication	Line managers/supervisors	Predominantly two-way	Line managers-employees	Employees' roles, Personal impact, e.g. appraisal discussions, team briefings
Internal team peer communication	Team colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Team information, e.g. team task discussions
Internal project peer communication	Project group colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Project information, e.g. project issues
Internal corporate communication	Strategic managers/top management	Predominantly one-way	Strategic managers-all employees	Organisational/corporate issues, e.g. goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements

Table 2. Internal communication matrix (Welch & Jackson, 2007)

This thesis will focus on two of the internal communication dimensions; internal line manager communication and internal corporate communication. These two dimensions are considered as essential when the target is to enhance employee experiences from the managerial perspective. Internal line manager communication and internal corporate communication are

explained more detailed in sub-sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3. Referring to the various definitions of employee experience, all kinds of communication that occurs in an organization can influence employee experience. Nevertheless, this study approaches employee experience as an experience of which the organization and its management can influence and enhance. Hence, internal peer and project peer communications, are excluded from the scope of this study.

2.2.2 Internal corporate communication

Internal corporate communication (ICC) is one dimension of internal communication, introduced by Welch and Jackson (2007). ICC refers to communication from the strategic management to other members of organization. Welch and Jackson (2007, 186) define internal corporate communication as “communication between an organisation’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organisation, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims”. As presented in the internal communication matrix, ICC is mainly one-way communication where employees are rather communication recipients than active participants. The content of ICC covers mainly organizational issues, such as goals and objectives. An important part of ICC is formed by the communication systems and channels, which Cornelissen (2014) identified in the definition of corporate information and communication systems CICS, which equals to ICC.

Welch and Jackson (2007) argue that internal corporate communication is useful since it is targeted to all employees inside an organization but at the same time it can be criticized as it occurs mainly one-way and it does not actively involve employees. However, especially in large organizations it is impossible to simultaneously reach all employees and have face-to-face dialogue about issues concerning the whole organization. Therefore, Welch and Jackson (2007) state that one-way communication in organizations is necessary and unavoidable. Since it is not realistic for the strategic management to discuss face-to-face with all members of an organization and to receive feedback of the matters communicated through internal corporate communication, it is important to acknowledge line manager’s role as a link and gatekeeper between strategic management and employees. Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasize also internal peer communication and internal project peer communication as sources of what employees want to know from the strategic management. Tourish and Robson (2006), in turn,

mention that upward communication towards strategic management is critical and arises from the communication between peers and project peers.

Figure 3 illustrates the goals and environments of internal corporate communication. Strategic management, in the middle of the circle in Figure 3, sends messages to all of the employees within an organization, forming the organization's internal environment, the dotted circle in Figure 3. Messages from the strategic management have four objectives, dark one-headed arrows in Figure 3; commitment, awareness, belonging and understanding. Despite the one-way nature of ICC, there is a possibility for a dialogue between employees and strategic managers depending on the organization, which is illustrated by the four two-headed-arrows in Figure 3.

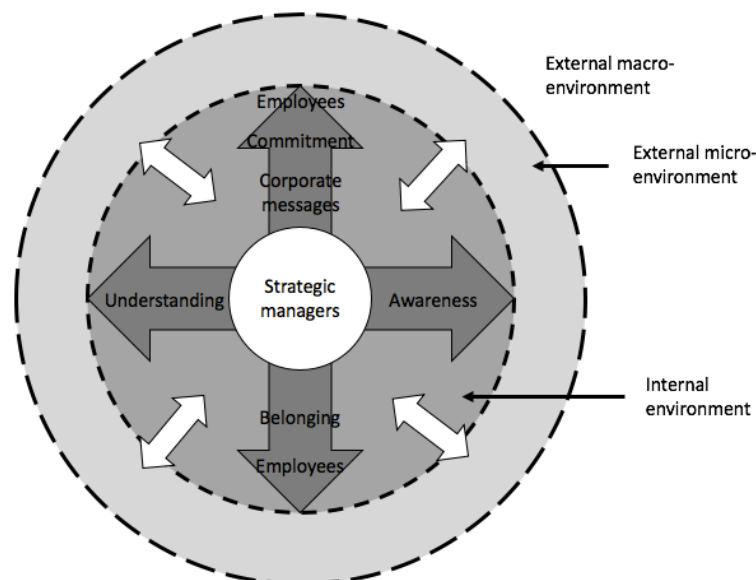


Figure 3. Internal corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007)

Internal corporate communication is connected to internal branding of an organization as it has been identified as instrumental in successfully implementing internal branding strategy (Chong, 2007; Grof, 2001). If internal corporate communication succeeds in its goals; creating awareness, commitment, belonging and understanding among the employees, it will positively influence the brand image of an organization among its employees. In fact, Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012) suggested that internal branding is a result of ICC actions which aim to increase employee commitment, loyalty and value identification. However, it is worth to notice

that in internal corporate communication, there are several audiences that need to be reached and effectively communicated, in order to increase the confidence and engagement towards the organization (Meng & Berger, 2012). Yet, internal corporate communication consists mostly of sending the same message for everyone and therefore it requires effective manager-employee communication to supplement it. According to Grunig (1992, 536) successful internal communication is a dynamic combination of different communication dimensions and shared responsibilities: “Excellent programs of employee communications are based on the concepts of strategic management, an integrated communication function, and the managerial role, and the two-way symmetrical model of public relations”.

2.2.3 Internal line manager communication

Internal line manager communication, a synonym for superior-subordinate communication (Jablin, 1979), implies two-way communication between a line manager and an employee (Welch & Jackson, 2007). It consists of “exchanges of information and influence between organizational members, at least one of whom has formal (as defined by official organizational sources) authority to direct and evaluate the activities of other organizational members” (Jablin, 1979). Line manager communication occurs throughout the organization, beginning from the chief executive officer (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Managers serve two purposes while communicating to and with their subordinates: control and motivation (Wińska, 2010).

Managers’ communication skills are inevitably important, as they tend to use a majority of their working time communicating to their subordinates in order to instruct, direct, coordinate and provide information and feedback (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Mintzberg, 1973). Hence, managers exercise leadership mostly through communication (Holladay & Coombs, 1993). Leadership and communication styles are connected and according to De Vries, Bakker-Pieper and Oostenveld (2010), people-oriented and charismatic leaders tend to be more communicative than task-oriented leaders. One people-oriented and especially studied leadership style is transformational leadership, which “occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass, 1990).

As proposed in the internal communication matrix, internal line manager communication is a two-way process, including both upward and downward communication. Katz and Kahn (1966) report different types of communication exchanged between a manager and an employee. Downward communications from manager to employee include (a) job instructions, (b) job rationale, (c) organizational procedures and practices, (d) feedback about subordinate performance, and (e) indoctrination of goals (pp. 239-241). Upward communication from the employee to the manager has four different forms including (a) information about the subordinate himself/herself, (b) information about co-workers and their problems, (c) information about organizational practices and policies, and (d) information about what needs to be done and how it can be done (p. 245). These communication types recognize also the issues dealing with the organization and other employees whereas the description of communication contents provided by Welch and Jackson (2007) concentrates mostly on the employee him- or herself.

As identified, ICC refers mostly to sending one similar message to everyone within the organization. However, especially in larger organizations, there are multiple organizational layers which need to be taken into account in communication. Therefore, as Kalla (2005, 309) argues, managers have significant roles as “bridges, linking the different layers”. Corporate communication functions within large organizations are simply not able to communicate effectively about all issues in different layers to all members of organization, particularly not face-to-face (Kalla, 2005). These arguments point out the importance of good coordination between ICC and internal line manager communication, as those can be seen as complementing each other.

Braun et al. (2019) have studied how the shift towards more digitally centred communication between manager and employee satisfy the employee’s needs and influence employee’s perceptions of the leader. The results indicate that employees prefer face-to-face communication and the even if it is used frequently, employees would desire to use it even more. Moreover, the study revealed that the amount of face-to-face communication influences positively the effectivity of communication, the way how the employee perceives his or her leader and also signals manager’s interest towards the employee. Face-to-face communication and its richness are discussed more extensively in the following sub-section.

Line manager communication has been widely studied and it has been identified to contribute significantly to employee's job satisfaction. In their research, Philippe, Helping and Koehler (2009) found that there are six particularly critical communication areas influencing the job satisfaction: feedback from the manager, clarification of company vision, offering justifications for changes, providing information of rewards, differences between manager's communication and other behaviour, and the match between employee's actions and communicated company vision. Madlock and Kennedy-Lightsey (2010) supplement this by arguing that employees are more satisfied at work when their managers apply mentoring behaviour in their management. Moreover, they suggest that manager's verbally aggressive communication has a major negative impact on employee's satisfaction and wellbeing at work. Not surprisingly, since direct manager is often the person with the employee most often communicates with and receives information and feedback from in the work context.

2.2.4 Communication channels

Inside organizations, as in any other context, communication emerges through various channels. Channel refers to "the methods and media used by a company to communicate and interact with its stakeholders" (Cornelissen, 2014; 275). Communication channels can be categorized in multiple ways. Klein (1996) distinguishes oral, written and electronic communication whereas Al-Ghamdi, Roy and Ahmed (2007) distinguish between traditional and technology related communication. Wińska (2010) separates formal communication channels from informal channels. More recent categorization is provided by Friedl and Vercic (2011) who separate traditional channels from social media channels. The last two categorizations refer to the development of communication technology during past few decades which has generated various new communication channels beside the more traditional channels like face-to-face and telephone communication. According to Friedl and Vercic (2011, 85) traditional internal communication channels include "employee magazines, intranet news, corporate television, e-mail and the 'board-of-directors' newsletter' as well as face-to-face communication and employee meetings". More recent communication channels refer to social medias and include "blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networking, podcasting, video and photo sharing and instant messenger as well as discussion forums" (Friedl & Vercic, 2011; 85).

In addition to the aforementioned channel categorizations, communication channels can be classified by their effectiveness. The most used classification for distinguishing different types of communication channels and their effectiveness is the theory of media richness established by Daft and Lengel (1984). According to the theory, different communication mediums that are used within organizations, have different levels of richness of information which ultimately influence on how the communication is perceived by the recipient (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Media richness of the communication mediums are evaluated based on four criteria: ability for giving instant feedback, usage of multiple cues, usage of varying and natural language, and the personal focus given for the communication (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987). Media richness continuum is presented below in figure 4.

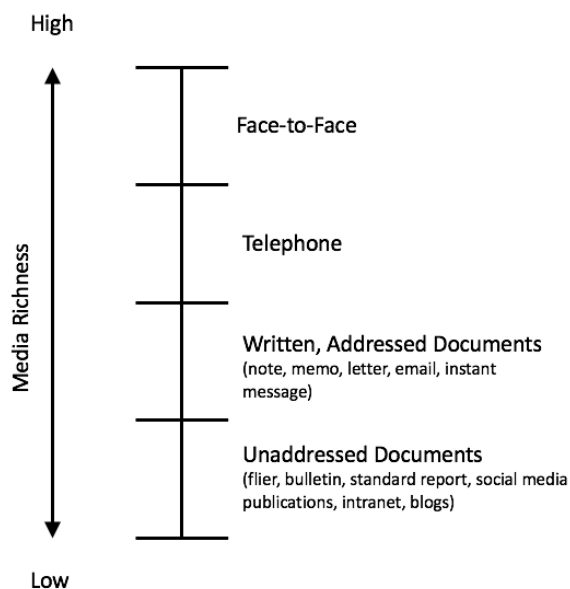


Figure 4. Media richness continuum (modified from Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987)

Face-to-face communication is a mixture of information and interaction, and also the most valuable tactic for providing credible communication (Quirke, 2008; D'Aprix, 2009). According to the media richness theory, face-to-face communication is the richest medium due to a possibility for instant feedback and customization of the message (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987). Despite the richness and its benefits of face-to-face communication, it is simultaneously a costly way of communication for organizations and hence organization are forced to consider when to substitute face-to-face communication with less costly alternatives, like electronic communication (O'Mara, 1999).

Telephone as a communication media is the second richest media after face-to-face communication. Telephone conversations have some common features with face-to-face communication: the medium is personal, using natural language is possible and the feedback can be given immediately. However, visual cues and body language are missing and therefore telephone communication relies on verbal and audio cues. (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987)

Written addressed documents have lower level of richness compared to face-to-face and telephone communication. Even though the content and the tone of message can be personalized as suitable for the recipient, written information sets its limitations for quick feedback and non-verbal cues are lacking which lower the richness of written addressed documents (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987). There has been a shift from more traditional addressed documents, notes and letters, towards instant messages and emails, which are nowadays largely used communication channels in organizations.

Unaddressed documents have the lowest level of media richness. More traditional unaddressed documents include for example fliers, bulletins and standard reports. More recent channels are social media publications, company intranets and blogs. Unaddressed documents are not directly targeted to any individual but rather to a wide audience for example within an organization (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987). Since these types of documents are suitable for sharing information organization wide, unaddressed documents are suitable channels for internal corporate communication where the objectives are communicating organisational or corporate level issues, including goals, new developments, activities and achievements (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Communication channel choice is an essential decision that influences the communication as the channel can either enhance or distort the message one is about to communicate (Lengel & Daft, 1988). According to Axley (2000), communication channel choices in organizations depend on multiple factors including the characteristics, diversity and expectations of organization's customers and employees, degrees of technology and ongoing globalization of labour and customer markets, economies and information. Further on, when the channel choices for organization are made, managers and employees are to make decisions about channel choice in each situation that requires communication. Melcher and Beller (1967) find four factors affecting to the decisions: nature of communication (i.e. giving order or requesting

information), personal characteristics of member directly or indirectly involved in the communication (i.e. language capabilities), integration of the social system (i.e. relationships among the organization) and communicational qualities of channels (i.e. speed and accountability).

2.2.5 Employee vs management perspective of internal communication

Ruck and Welch (2012) argue that the interest towards internal communication has been mostly from the managerial point of view and the employees' perspective has gained only little interest so far. Wińska (2013) agrees by stating that communication is a way for manager to fulfil his or her role in the organization and therefore internal communication research is mainly done from the managerial perspective. However, internal communication should be seen not only as a mandatory managerial task but more as a possibility to positively influence employees' experiences and motivation to work in the organization.

Welch and Jackson (2007) draw the attention to employees by suggesting that "research into employee preferences for channel and content of internal corporate communication is required to ensure it meets employees' needs". This is a well justified viewpoint, since employees are the main audience of internal communication and in fact, the fundamental reason for the existence of internal communication. If employees' opinions about internal communication are not taken into account by the management and communication professionals, employees' motivation towards their work may decrease, leading in the worst case to resignations and employees leaving the organization (Constantin & Baias, 2015). Constantin and Baias (2015) summarize that organization's mission, values, strategy and internal policies are unnecessary unless those are communicated to the employees. They point out that employees must be aware of those, know the content and comprehend them similarly. In a light of these arguments, the content of internal communication should be approached from the perspective of what employees need and want to know, instead of focusing only on what the management feels that is important to communicate.

However, Cornelissen (2014) addresses the importance of both managers and employees in successful internal communication by suggesting that the most productive internal communication is a two-way process rather than top-down action. Clearly, both managers and

employees should be involved in the planning and designing of internal communication in order to consider the needs and preferences of both groups. For example, internal line manager communication has several purposes: the manager should get information about the employee and his or her work whereas the employee should receive information relevant to his or her work and the organization. Moreover, the communication should increase trust and strengthen the relationship between the employee and manager. Therefore, the communication should be viewed holistically from the perspectives of both managers and employees.

Owing to these justifications, part of the focus of this thesis is to find out employees' perceptions on the communication supporting their employee experiences. Ultimately, these underpinnings justify the chosen focus of this study; internal communication as a strategic management function where the employees' perceptions of the internal communication related to employee experiences are taken into account. As Cornelissen (2014) points out, corporate communication has a complex nature involving participants in different roles, which is also captured in the focus of this thesis.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will elaborate the methodology which was used in conducting the empirical part of the thesis. The chapter begins with introducing the chosen research method, intensive case study, and justifications for it. After that, the research data collection is explained and justified, including the selected data sources and data collection method which is followed by the explanation of data analysis. Finally, the trustworthiness of this study is discussed.

3.1 Research method

The objective of the thesis is to study the role of internal corporate communication in influencing and supporting employee experiences. Due to this nature of the research and the lack of previous studies and theory regarding employee experiences and the relation of internal communication to it, this thesis was conducted as a qualitative research. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), qualitative research is suitable when the aim is to focus on business-related phenomena in their own context and to explore the complexity. The phenomena in the focus of this study is considered as highly dependent on the context where it emerges and thereby this qualitative approach is justified.

Within the qualitative research field, intensive case study was chosen as the research method. Context of this thesis is a single case company, operating in retail business in Finland. Intensive case study method was chosen since employee experience is more meaningful to study from a perspective of a single and unique organization, as it can mean different things in different organizations (Morgan, 2017). Case study fits well for examining this specific concept as the case study research leaves space for diversity and complexity avoiding too simple and reduced research methodology (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

In business research studies, the focus is often on real-life business issues and the purpose is to give managers evidence-based advice (Bryman & Bell, 2003). In this study too the ultimate goal is to find out ways how the management could improve the employee experiences through internal communication. Thus, the method of case study suits very well for this purpose. Furthermore, case study is especially applicable for studying human phenomena (Gillham, 2000). Therefore, the case study method is appropriate for this thesis as the purpose is to study

communication and its influences on employee experience. Moreover, case study method was chosen for this thesis in order to capture a contemporary phenomenon within an organization. A case study investigates an individual, a group, a community, an institution – or a group of the previous and aims to answer to specific research questions and pursues a range of various types of evidence from the case setting (Gillham, 2000). In this thesis, a single organization and its employees are investigated in order to find evidence for improving the employee experiences through communication. More specifically, the purpose is to explain a presumed causal link between employee experiences and internal communication, which is assumed to be too complex for survey or experimental strategy (Yin, 2009).

Specifically, this thesis was conducted as an intensive case study research. Intensive case study aims to comprehend thoroughly a unique case and to provide a broad, holistic and context specific narration. It differs from extensive case study, which in turn compares multiple cases for elaborating, testing or generalizing a theory. When executing an intensive case study research, the objective is to interpret and understand a single, unique case and to elaborate the case-specific context's cultural meanings and sense-making processes. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) In this thesis, the objective is to study internal communication and its relation to employee experience specifically in the case company.

Yin (2009) suggests five varying rationales, for choosing a single-case (refers to intensive case study by Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) study over a multiple-case study. The first rationale is appropriate when a case is critical for testing a well-formulated theory. The second rationale for choosing a single-case study is when the case is classified as an extreme or unique. The third rationale refers to choosing a single-case study because the case is representative or typical, i.e. a commonplace setting. The fourth rationale is a revelatory case, meaning that the researcher has access to a setting which has not been earlier possible to access. The last rationale is a longitudinal case which means studying the same case multiple times. (Yin, 2009) Considering this thesis, the rational for choosing a single-case study method was that this case is a representative one. More specifically, the case company is a representing one among large Finnish organizations.

3.2 Data collection

The main research data for this thesis were gathered through interviewing employees of the case company. Interviews as data sources are beneficial as they can be targeted and insightful; focusing straight on the topic of the study and providing causal inferences and descriptions (Yin, 2009). In this specific case, interviews are considered as the most suitable option for data collection as this study's objective is to find out about employees' experiences and perceptions of employee experience and internal communication from the employees' points of view. Interviews were focused, semi-structured interviews, which are useful when studying "what" and "how" questions, both of which are in question in this study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Semi-structured interviews enable collecting comprehensive data in a systematic way but at the same keeping the interviews conversational and informal (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). All the interviews respected the chosen themes and a certain set of structured questions, leaving however space to investigate possible other, related topics rising from the conversation. Conducting semi-structured interviews can reveal insights that without free discussion could possibly be missed. However, must be noted that in general, interviews are prone to biases, inaccuracy and reflexivity for multiple reasons, such as poorly articulated questions and poor recall, which might ultimately influence the research negatively (Yin, 2009).

Gathered interview data is described in the table 3. The interviews were divided into two groups in order to capture a holistic view of the employee experience and internal communication in the case company. The first group of interviewees consists of communication and HR specialists who were asked both about their own ideas about employee experience and internal communication, as well as general information about executing communication and employee experience related HR practices in the case company. The second group of interviewees consists of employees who were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences of company's internal communication and their employee experiences. This group includes employees from various business areas and different positions. Both interviewee groups had slightly differing questions, formed on the basis of the research objectives. Interviews were conducted in Finnish and the analysis was conducted in Finnish as well. In this thesis, the interview extracts are reproduced in English. All interviewees were interviewed once for 35-60 minutes during the summer of 2019. Interview agendas for both interviewee groups are in appendices 1 & 2.

Alias	Interviewee group	Interview date	Interview duration
H1	HR representative	16.5.2019	57 minutes
H2	HR representative	16.5.2019	42 minutes
H3	HR representative	16.5.2019	52 minutes
H4	Communication representative	23.5.2019	56 minutes
H5	Communication representative	14.8.2019	48 minutes
H6	Employee	23.5.2019	44 minutes
H7	Employee	18.6.2019	57 minutes
H8	Employee	25.6.2019	37 minutes
H9	Employee	25.6.2019	42 minutes
H10	Employee	28.6.2019	35 minutes
H11	Employee	5.9.2019	37 minutes

Table 3. Interview data

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis of a study is done in order to make sense of what people have said, to look for patterns, to put together what is said somewhere with something said in another place, and to integrate the different things people have said (Quinn, 2002). Data analysis of this thesis was conducted as a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 79), define thematic analysis as “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. The aim of this thesis is to identify themes emerging from the interview data that represent the understanding of employee experience in the case company and further, the themes that represent the role of internal communication in influencing employee experiences. Analysis process of this thesis followed Braun’s and Clarke’s (2006) six-step model, which is considered as suitable for this study due to its clearness and usability. The steps are as follows:

1. Gathering the data & transcribing
2. Identifying preliminary codes
3. Identifying themes from the codes
4. Reviewing the themes
5. Defining & naming the themes
6. Writing a report based on the findings. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study

As using the evaluation criteria of quantitative research; reliability and validity, is problematic in this case of a qualitative study, Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) evaluation criteria is applied for this thesis. Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose assessing research's trustworthiness according to four different criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. *Credibility* of the study refers to assessing whether the researcher is able to present an acceptable reality convincingly in his or her research report. *Transferability* evaluates the possibility to transfer the research results into another context or making generalizations based to the study. Transferability of the research results can be evaluated by the depth and the details of describing the case organization's culture in the research. *Reliability* of the researcher is evaluated by the criteria of dependability, which assesses the possibility to replicate the research regardless of the researcher. The last criteria, *confirmability* is meant for ensuring good faith in researchers' actions and validating that the researcher's personal values or theoretical dispositions has not too much affected to the research or its results. (Bryman & Bell, 2003)

As employee experience can mean different things depending on the organization, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all organizations from different fields and environments. Secondly, internal communication and its effective practices vary in different organizations and what works well in a certain organization, might not function in another type of organization. Bearing in mind these two context specific concepts which my thesis is focusing on, the results are insufficient for making any broader generalizations. However, my judgement is that the results could be, at least partially, transferred to other organizations from similar field, background and culture than the case company.

I, as a researcher, do not have a direct contact to the case company, so I have been able to objectively approach the company and the data that I will be collecting from within the company. Besides, I do not have any personal opinions about employee experiences or internal communication in that specific organization. However, I am very interested in the topics of employee experience and internal communication and that is one main reason for me to choose this topic. In that sense, I do have my own set of beliefs and feelings regarding the topics. Clearly, I must have been aware of my own values and thinking that might guide me in conducting this research.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the analysis of the interview data. These findings aim to answer the research questions posed in the introductory chapter of this thesis and therefore this chapter is divided into two distinctive parts. The first part of this chapter reflects to the sub-research question and describes what employee experience in general means for the case company employees. The descriptions are supplemented with interviewees experiences of working at the case company. The second part of the findings focuses on the main research question about how internal communication can influence employee experiences.

4.1 Employee experience in the case company

The interviewees were asked to describe their ideas of what employee experience consists of and also their own employee experiences in the case company. Six common elements were identified among the responses: 1) Culture and community, 2) Facilitating premises and working tools, 3) Meaningful work with development opportunities, 4) Supportive and guiding managers, 5) Holistic work wellbeing and 6) Value-based organization.

Culture and community

Several employees addressed organizational culture as a significant part of their employee experience. In sum, the employees' accounts regarding culture echoed a general view that culture creates the sense of ambience and originates from all activities and communication inside the organization. More specifically, the employees described ideal organizational culture as flexible, discussing and based on helping others, friendly, goal directed and based on real actions and appreciation. Most of all, culture was seen as a term including several elements in organizations:

I would say that organizational culture influences employee experiences the most. I say this because I see culture as an umbrella term, which under leadership, premises and many other elements belong. (H11)

The employees valued a positive overall feeling and atmosphere in an organization, and they saw the feeling and the atmosphere being created in and through the social interactions and encounters between the members of organization. Specifically, what they brought out as important was that they as employees have a feeling of belonging to the community and culture inside the organization. Several interviewees pointed out that they want to feel themselves as insiders of the organization and that the feeling could be strengthened, for example through listening actively what employees want to say. Moreover, the interviewees' accounts suggested that all employee groups should be taken into account and treated equally in the work community. H10 perceives the atmosphere as the largest single element influencing employee experience, but also as something that is shaped by many factors simultaneously.

-- first of all, it is the atmosphere. It is influenced by the co-workers, the manager and the common spirit at work. I think it is the most important part of employee experience. All the rest is smaller, for example, whether the workload is ok. (H10)

The case company in particular was described as a forward-moving and eventful organization, which maintains the interest towards one's own work and the organization. In the extract below, H4 links the organizational culture in the case company to the abundance of events, emphasizing the idea that these different events strengthen the organizational culture. Also, s/he brings up the idea that the field the company operates in influences the feeling and employee's interest towards the work. It was also a general theme in the interviews that working in a field of business that develops and which is in an interesting phase, shapes the work and is interesting to follow from an insider perspective. Overall, the employees felt that it is more interesting to work in an environment where something new is constantly going on and for example new campaigns and product launches are promoted also internally and not only to external partners and customers.

What I have noticed is that we have organized lots of internal events. When there is a new product in the market, we have arranged product tastings and we have given samples for employees. -- I think we have invested in experiencing. (H4)

Facilitating premises and working tools

Physical premises, tools and systems were mentioned by the majority of interviewees as shaping their employee experiences. Generally, what interviewees brought out was that cosy and comfortable facilities make their working more pleasurable and they can feel that they are appreciated when the organization invests in the facilities. Particularly, the interviewees emphasized that when the physical environment has a high quality, employees have better starting point for working and the premises can facilitate the work towards productivity and innovativeness. In the case company, the recent relocation to new premises, was identified by the interviewees as a significant factor changing their employee experiences as more positive. According to interviewees, new facilities bring positive energy and support encounters (H9), boost the company culture and openness (H7) and facilitate the work in a new way (H11). As H7 describes in the extract below, different functions were previously separated into different locations which s/he identifies as one major reason strengthening the silos inside the organization. Generally, the answers from interviewees demonstrated how strong influence the physical buildings can have to the social structures inside an organization and especially to open communication throughout the organization.

Employee experience is always affected by the physical premises and if we look back to the history, we can see that there have been strong silos. -- When we see that ok, we are here and we can see what others are doing, it affects the experience a lot. Previously all negotiation rooms were hidden behind the walls, but now there are windows instead. Quite a different culture if you think about in terms of transparency. (H7)

Also working tools and systems that employees use to perform their work were seen as part of the employee experience by the interviewees. Particularly in the case company, those were experienced very positively. H2 links the available systems and services to employees' personal development:

We use high quality services and systems. Through those you can maintain your own competencies. As an employee you must also think about your own CV and take care of your development. XX (case company) offers good conditions for that. (H2)

Moreover, the abundance of general resources of the company were seen very positively in the interviewees' accounts. H5 explains that it is more motivating to do something when you know that the organization has resources to accomplish the work:

In XX (case company) we have the quality in everything we do. We are a well-established company, so we are able to do things properly. I think that it is great. (H5)

Meaningful work with development opportunities

Besides the working environment and the conditions that organization offers for working, the interviewees pointed out that the work itself and its features play a key role in shaping employee experiences. Interviewees highlighted that meaningful work, with clearly defined targets keeps them motivated and improves their employee experiences. For example, a possibility to see how one's own work can influence customers, colleagues or the business, seemed to increase the feeling of working for a purpose. H3 explicates that s/he experiences working in the case company as meaningful:

Meaningful work is one of the biggest motivators for me. I feel that several meaningful things come true when I'm working here. (H3)

Additionally, H1 and H2 express in the extracts below, that work attributes, versatility, novelty, significance and the ability to influence one's work, affect their employee experiences positively:

The work here has been more versatile than I thought, especially since we have had more than 20 acquisitions while I've been here. My employee experience has increased also because I have been able to do so much new things. (H1)

In XX (case company) you are able to do internationally significant work. And you can also affect your own work and shape it, based on what you see as important and what you bring forward. (H2)

Several interviewees pointed out that they want to work in an organization where they are able to develop themselves both within their current positions and also in terms of proceeding in their careers. Specifically, what interviewees brought out was that along the development opportunities employees are able to perceive their work more likely as a long-term choice. In the case company, the huge amount of learning and development possibilities inside the company were perceived by the interviewees as a positive consequence of the large size of the company, which was especially brought up by H6 and H11. H6 adds that in the case company, the development opportunities are communicated well. For employees it is important to be aware of the possibilities when they plan their careers and possibly consider other positions outside the company.

If you think about your own career, here are so many directions that you can move forward, and I think that the career development opportunities are well communicated here. (H6)

There are so many possibilities to do different kinds of things and develop oneself just because the company is so huge. You can easily change your position based on what interests you. You just have to make it clear that you wish to do that. (H11)

Supportive and guiding managers

Interviewees' accounts indicated that managers, both line managers and C-level management, carry out significant roles in influencing employee experiences. Leadership capabilities and especially communicative capabilities were highlighted by several interviewees. More specifically, interviewees suggested that organization should focus on leadership development and encourage managers to support and motivate employees in their work. Further or, interviewees responses give a reason to argue that the style in which manager communicates, influences the relationship and is a determinant of trust between the manager and employee.

I feel that especially since I am in the beginning of professional career, my leader knows how to support me, to motivate me and to help me whenever I need. I get freedom to work and influence but still my leader is there for me. It is very important for me at the moment. (H9)

Interviewees argued that for an employee it is important to feel that you are listened, both by your own manager and the top management through internal corporate communication. Specifically, interviewees pointed out that when they have some wishes and ideas about how their employee experience could be improved, it is important that they can express themselves, feel that they are listened to and further on that the organization would actually take actions based on the suggestions or alternatively explain why any actions cannot be taken.

According to the interviewees, leadership skills include also the ability to follow employee's work, not in an authoritarian way, but critically and simultaneously trusting an employee. H7 states that ultimately, it is the line manager who carries the responsibility of evaluating employee's workload and development:

Leadership affects a lot. How well my manager is able to take care that I have enough work, not too little, not too much. And also ensure that I get development opportunities and chances to move forward in my career if I want to. And how managers communicate with the subordinates. (H7)

The interviewees' accounts regarding managers' influence on their employee experience suggest that the line manager impacts subordinate's employee experience on a personal level whereas top management is predominantly seen to influence the overall atmosphere and feeling inside the organization. According to interviewees' accounts, top management should be visible, near employees and easy to approach. H10 suggests that the case company's CEO has contributed significantly the pace of change of the organization and H7 adds that also the company culture has changed along the CEO.

-- especially during the last years along the new CEO, there are lots of new winds blowing in here. That has even improved my employee experience. (H10)

Employee experience has changed tremendously since the C-level management has changed. Our new CEO has done lots of changes, and not only in the form of mergers and acquisitions, but especially changed the culture, so it has changed a lot. (H7)

Holistic work wellbeing

Interviewees pointed out several factors related to wellbeing at work as determining their employee experience. According to interviewees, wellbeing consists of physical, mental and social elements which can be supported by the employer in many ways, including occupational health care, air quality, ergonomics, sports, relaxing possibilities and childcare. Work wellbeing is was identified by the interviewees to be tightly connected to their overall wellbeing and life outside working environment. Like investing in premises, wellbeing support from the employer is seen as an expression of care towards the employees, suggests H5:

-- of course, work wellbeing matters and the way it is supported. We have our own occupational health care, gym and different relaxation stations. Those are all signs that employer wants to support employee experiences and it is important. (H5)

Despite the existence of several wellbeing services, interviewees reported that it is important for an organization to communicate about those services so that employees are truly aware of those and can start utilizing those. Especially in a large organization, which is potentially divided into several locations, it is crucial to inform comprehensively about wellbeing support and services. Interviewees demonstrated that it is actually more irritating to hear that a certain service has existed, but it has not been informed enough as if the service did not exist at all.

Value-based organization

Employer's values and especially the visibility of values in the organization's operations, are increasingly important for employees, indicated the interview data. According to H3, H6 and H9, employees seek for values that they can work through and which correspond to their own personal values. In fact, if employer states its values publicly and stands behind the values, interviewees saw that it is easier for an employee to work in the company. Corporate social responsibility and equality were top mentioned employer values among the interviewees.

It is important that your own values correspond to the employer's values. For example, XX (case company) is a very responsible company and that is very essential for many people here. (H6)

H3 explained that before joining the case company, s/he listed interesting companies where s/he could potentially work at and the case company was on the list mainly due to its values. This account reflects how important it is for a company to communicate the values both outside and inside, so that they can actually attract employees and further to retain them, when the values are actually visible and alive in the daily work.

4.2 Communication shapes employee experiences

After discussing what employee experience means for the case company employees, the interviews focused on the interviewees' thoughts about internal communication practices and the connection between their employee experience and internal communication. Interview questions were mostly related to internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication, following the theoretical focus of this study defined in chapter 2. Findings associated with these two communication dimensions are presented in the following sections and categorized under separate themes.

4.2.1 Internal corporate communication

Strategy communication

The majority of interviewees linked internal corporate communication with strategy communication within the company. As the employees described top management's and communication department's communication, they referred to strategy in different forms. As argued in subchapter 4.1, employees highly value the meaningfulness of their work and it is one of the major determinants of employee experience. According to the interviewees, when they have been communicated about the strategy so that they understand it and their own position in fulfilling it, they are more likely to be able to find their own work as meaningful. Generally, based on the interviews, strategy communication can be perceived as an essential part of internal corporate communication.

Strategy was identified as a challenging topic to communicate as it might be difficult for employees to assimilate. Therefore, as interviews entail, the communication related to strategy, should be as clear as possible and free of strategy jargon. Moreover, interviewees argued that

strategy needs to be convinced to the employees, preferably face-to-face and therefore companywide events, where top management presents the strategy were seen as a good and efficient practice. It was also emphasized that strategy needs repetition and employees should be given easy and low-barrier opportunities to ask about it and participate in the conversations.

Absolutely the best way (to communicate strategy) is when you come to listen to it in a strategy info. It is always the most efficient way when the manager speaks. The events are informed in advance and you can ask in the end. (H4)

The idea of knowing the strategy and working according to it was also identified as important by the interviewees, who expressed also critical opinions about this and saw it as something where the case company could improve. H11 brought out that all employees should really know the company's strategy and incorporate it in his or her working. Thus, s/he feels that the strategy communication in the case company could be improved:

Everyone's work should be guided by the strategy. It should be something that you learn inside out and I think there should be even some sample tests for employees. Now I see that it does not guide the work of all workers. It has remained as management's strategy jargon. (H11)

Organizational layers & cross-organizational communication

As concluded in the literature review, employee experience by its nature is very company specific. Different company attributes, such as size and structures were identified to influence employee experience through internal communication. In a large organization, such as in the case company, there are multiple organizational layers which need to be taken into account in the internal communication. Interviewees discovered that in the case company, the highest level of communication, dealing with generic and organization wide information, works well but internal communication's mid-layers, referring to different departments and business areas, are often either forgotten or disrupted. As an example, interviewees argued that lacking information from other parts of the organization can cause unnecessary extra work, if something has been already done in another department and could have been utilized somewhere else. Ultimately,

based on the interviews, can be argued that information disruption makes employees feel frustrated and disordered towards the organization and their own work.

In addition to organization-wide communication, I would add a more targeted level of communication for employees. Of course, internal communication for tens of thousands of employees is very general. Therefore, something between top management's and line manager's communication is needed. (H8)

Interviewees were curious to know what is happening in different parts of the organization, which requires internal communication horizontally. H10 emphasizes that in a large organization, cross-organization communication can also increase the feeling of a unified organization:

Here in the XX (business area) we would gladly like to know what is going on in the YY and ZZ (business areas). That communication could be added even more, and I think that it would unify us a lot. (H10)

Open but targeted ICC

A highly valued aspect of ICC among the interviewees was the openness of communication. Employees described how they want to feel that they get enough of information, not only relevant to their work but also concerning the organization, in order to avoid a feeling of being covered up. H8 identifies that when the company communicates to its employees, it is not only information sharing but also a sign of appreciation towards the employees:

Information sharing makes employees feel that they are appreciated and deserve to know instead of thinking that they will notice afterwards, which is not a nice feeling. (H8)

However, despite the demand for open companywide communication, interviewees' responses indicated that ICC should be carefully targeted in order to serve different employee groups and information needs. Several interviewees noted that they suffer from information overload both

in terms of internal corporate communication and other types of internal communication. Hence, accurate targeting of ICC messages would relieve the feeling of overwhelm and stress as ICC can be strategically managed unlike peer or project peer communications. Interviewees suggested that for example, intranet news, could be classified into different themes and categories, so that it would be easier for employees to decide what do they want to follow. Now interviewees felt that they miss relevant news since those get lost in the endless news feed flow due to constant updates.

Also communication and HR representatives acknowledged that targeting is a major challenge in the case company's ICC and a lot is already done in order to improve it, but a lot of work is still remaining.

Managers have their own channel containing relevant information for them. But for employees we only have one intranet, where should be more targeted information for people in different functions and departments. However, everyone should still have access to all company wide information. That is maybe the biggest problem. (H2)

In general, interviewees felt that ICC in the case company is rather open and transparent and improvements can be observed constantly. However, interviewees thought that communication around salaries both at manager-employee level and ICC level is lacking transparency. Salary and other compensations were identified as part of the overall employee experience but even more than the actual compensations, open communication around those were emphasized. H9 accentuates that especially the Millennials, who form an increasing share of employees, want to know the reasons for their salaries:

I do claim that for most of the Millennials, the salary itself does not matter that much. They rather want to know that what does it consist of and why it is what it is. And they want to have open discussion about it. But here it seems to be a top secret and you don't really know the reasons. (H9)

Furthermore, H11 wondered whether ICC embellishes the reality of the organization, including projects and other organizational initiatives. S/he also stated that in order for employees to trust

the messages, ICC should convey the reality of the organization, just as it is. Based on the interviews, can be argued that in case the ICC lacks credibility, employees' satisfaction towards the communication and also to the organization can decrease.

I do contemplate that how embellishing our internal corporate communication is. Sometimes when you the reality, for example if you have been in a project where is a massive chaos. Then ICC gives you an image that it is the best thing ever. So every time you read about a cool case happening, you start to think that what the reality might be. (H11)

Reactive change communication

Openness in internal communication was brought up especially related to change communication situations. Employees want to know the progress of ongoing change initiatives and therefore constant updates of projects were seen very positively. Interviewees pointed out that the company should be reactive in change communication and rather communicate, even if there is nothing particular to be informed, than leave employees confused and uncertain. In case there are situations when nothing can yet be communicated, H10 suggests that projects could communicate about possible delays and estimates about when updates could be available.

If there has been a lot of communication about a project and then there is suddenly silent for a long time, you start wondering that what is going on. Especially when communicating about ongoing projects, there should be updates about the progress. It doesn't have to be anything special, but if something is underway, it would be better to inform that the project continues or delays. (H10)

Inspiring content & warm tone

A general theme rising from the interviews related to internal corporate communication was that the tone of ICC matters significantly. More specifically, the interviewees stressed that the language in ICC should be understandable and free of business jargon. Besides the actual message, the interviewees suggested that the tone and language used in the communication influence employees' reactions to the communication. They concluded that ICC should have a warm tone, which makes the communication feel like it comes from a human to human, instead

of from corporate to human. However, based on the interviews, it was evident that the wide audience, including various types of employees, makes ICC even more complicated in terms of defining the tone and language. H5 suggests that by adjusting ICC tone of voice as suitable for all employees, the company can increase the chances of dialogues with employees:

Tone of voice is very important. So that we can encourage people to participate and it would feel natural to do so. It cannot be too business language because not everyone would understand it. (H5)

Interviewees identified that at its, best internal corporate communication can inspire employees in their own work and lead to better employee experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that ICC should not only be informative communication, but also uplifting and aiming to strengthen the community inside the company. Internal success stories of other employees as well as motivational speeches from the C-level management were seen as inspirational ICC content. Both of those content types are being used in the case company and experienced very positively:

We bring up stories of our people, about their success and we share team introductions, for example about a team behind a certain initiative. Those increase the feeling of meaningfulness. (H4)

-- In that sense I am a very easy audience. If I go to a staff info or if I somewhere else hear a leader speaking, I get easily inspired of those big speeches. If they speak with enthusiasm, I am in. (H7)

Omni-channel communication

Intranet is the main ICC channel in the case company, which is typical for large organizations. It has many advantages, as it can be easily updated and followed, and it can quickly reach the company wide audience. Yet interviewees considered that ICC should utilize more extensively different communication channels so that the experience of communication would be more seamless, omni-channel experience. For example, news could be informed visibly on a high level in the premises whereas more detailed information could be found from intranet. So

ideally, ICC would be all around the company and premises would be more efficiently utilized in delivering the information and engaging employees to their work and to participate in communication.

In our premises, there should be more visible communication from the top management. I would like to see it all over the premises, on the screens, in the corridors and cafés. So that it would really touch your skin. (H9)

4.2.2 Internal line manager communication

Sharing filtered information

As identified in the second chapter, internal line manager communication consists of upward and downward communication (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Downward communication means manager's information sharing downwards from organization's higher levels to employees, which interviewees saw as line manager communication's most important aspect. Manager has a responsibility in forwarding relevant information from different organizational stages, including HR information to their employees. Interviewees highlighted that manager should be able to filter the information they receive, so that employees would get messages that are relevant for them and concerning their work. H1, who is in a managerial position, points out that the information flow towards a manager is huge and there is a time pressure to forward relevant information for employees:

I (as a manager) should constantly have a filter on regarding what I should communicate to my team. I notice that if I don't communicate immediately, I forget it. (H1)

Interviews with company representatives in managerial positions indicated that it is challenging for them to find out what is the adequate amount of information they should communicate to their subordinates. However, employees pointed out that both too excessive and too scarce information flows influence the employees negatively. In particular, too much irrelevant information can cause confusion and exhaust in employees as they have to evaluate themselves

what is “nice to know” or “need to know”, states H10. On the contrary, H11 illustrates that lack of information cause frustration:

Sometimes I feel frustrated when I have missed something interesting and I know that managers have been informed and asked to forward the information. Then I just wonder that why didn't my manager bother telling me. (H11)

According to communication and HR interviewees, internal line manager communication in the case company is firmly controlled on behalf of HR department and there are specific processes ensuring the information flow. Line managers receive a monthly newsletter including topical issues which should be communicated to employees. In addition, there is a separate intranet page for managers which consists of information related to employment and leadership. Despite these organization wide communication processes, several employee interviewees felt that their managers' communication towards them lack structure and right timing.

My manager does not communicate in a structured manner. Sometimes in the team meetings s/he remembers to inform everything and sometimes not. I am not saying that it (manager's communication) should be really systematic but there should be a certain logic how s/he communicates. (H11)

Despite the manager's responsibility in ensuring the information diffusion, H1 continued that also employees should be active in following the news and information in other communication channels and not to expect managers to choose all necessary information on their behalf. H11 agreed that employees have their own responsibility in seeking and following information around them.

Ensuring the message understanding

According to interviewees' accounts, managers should simultaneously – while filtering and sharing organizational information, especially top management level information – make sure

that the information is understood, and the employees are able to perceive what the information means for the whole organization and specifically for themselves.

I am that kind of a person who likes to understand the big picture, who does what in our team, how we link together and what is the big plan. That is not shared in our team. (H8)

Generally, if the manager communicates and the subordinate has more questions than clarity, manager clearly needs to improve. (H7)

Interviewees saw that the most importantly, manager must ensure that employees affiliate the company's strategy that is first communicated by the top management in the form of internal corporate communication. They described strategy communication as a process that begins from the top management and flows down to the team level, where the manager debates on the strategy with the employees. In section 4.1, it was identified that strategy can be difficult for employees to assimilate. Especially due to its sometimes complicated and abstract nature, interviewees pointed out that manager must take care that employees are not left alone with digesting the strategy and finding one's connection to it. Hence, some interviewees saw that the most crucial part of strategy communication takes place in the team level between manager and employees. This is acknowledged in the case company's strategy as H5 highlights:

The objective is that everyone working at XX (case company), knows the strategy and knows one's own role in executing it. Then it goes a long way from the CEO to the line managers. So the biggest part of strategy communication is indeed in the team. It is not just a C-level issue. (H5)

Adaptation of communication style

Several interviewees described that managers' communication style affects to the way how they receive and interpret messages. For example, if there is a negative message to be communicated, manager can adjust his or her style of conveying the message based on the expected reaction of the employee. H7 emphasizes that managers should be able to adapt their communication styles

depending on the employee's personality since different employees want to be led and communicated with in different ways.

Manager should think about the personality of the employee. It doesn't work if you tell a monotonous message to everyone since the employees are different. It depends on the personality and the way employees act, are they quieter or very active and social. -- It requires sensitivity to know one's team and to recognize the communication that suits the best. (H7)

Upward communication from employee to manager implicates that internal line manager communication is a two-way process that builds a relationship between a manager and employee (Katz & Kahn, 1966). It became clear from the interviews that trustful and open discussions with one's manager, are an important determinant of employee experience. Open discussions, according to the interviewees imply receiving and giving feedback both ways, discussing about work, development, motivation and also personal issues. In the extract below, H6 emphasizes that when the relationship with a manager is good, employee can trust the manager in all situations, even concerning sensitive issues. Moreover, manager's communicative behaviour was seen as essential in indicating the trust.

Right from the beginning, my manager has said that we can talk about everything and if I have some critique towards the organization or someone else, I can trust that the information remains confidential. (H6)

Employees certainly have different preferences in terms of communication channels when communicating with their managers. For some employees, using emails and instant messengers serve their needs whereas other employees might prefer face-to-face communication with their managers. Overall, employees' accounts suggest that face-to-face communication between employee and manager improves the relationship and increases the trust, as H3 clarifies:

Face-to-face communication has a big role in manager-employee communication. It transfers feelings, motivation and reactions the best. The more things could be carried out by face-to-face communication, the better. (H3)

Human-to-human communication

Interviewees experienced that manager's communication should convey genuine care, appreciation and interest towards the employee, as well as motivate and encourage them to do their best at work. Based on the interviews it can be argued that employee needs to know one's importance in the organization and manager has a responsibility in communicating it on behalf of the organization. Especially in a large organization like in the case company, where employees rarely have a personal connection to the top management, the line manager should be the one to communicate employee's value to the employee. However, interviewees felt that despite the employee-manager setting, the communication from the manager should be genuine and not reflect too much the authority the manager has over employee. For example, authoritarian leadership and way of communicating were perceived as detrimental in terms of employee motivation and employee experience. H9 illustrates that communication between employee and manager at its best can be delineated as *human-to-human* communication where the actual employee-manager setting is left aside, and the opponent is seen as a human instead:

-- it (internal line manager communication) makes my experience good, because it is human-to-human communication like with anyone else. Even if I have some complicated issues, I am not afraid of talking about those with my manager. I can go and tell cause all kinds of things are part of our lives. (H9)

Regarding the credibility of internal line manager communication, the interview data indicated that manager's communication should be natural and spontaneous as well as coherent with manager's other behaviour. Interviewees' accounts give a reason to argue that despite the identified requirements for internal line manager communication (i.e. structure in information sharing), manager should carry out the communication in respect to his or her own personality so that the communication would appear more genuine to the employees.

Leading by communicative example

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that ultimately, through all communicative practices, manager influences the way his or her team communicates. In the extract below, H7

demonstrates that manager acts as an example of a communicator to the employees. Therefore, manager should consider how the communicative practices appear to the employees and lead employees by example. In particular, manager should be conscious about one's own communication and reflect it to the ideal state of communication of one's team. Interviewees identified that manager has a leading role especially in team meetings and through exemplary communication manager can consolidate the communication among team members.

It is important to think when communicating whether I am absent-minded. Especially if I am in a meeting, do I send emails and look at my phone. Because if I am a manager and you are a subordinate, it would mean something to you and you would interpret it somehow. (H7)

5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents the discussion and conclusions of this study. First, the above presented findings from the interview data are discussed and reflected to the existing literature. After that, final conclusions are formulated based on the findings. Finally, this thesis ends with managerial implications and suggestions for further research directions in the future, both for the case company and academia in general.

5.1 Discussion of findings

In this section, the findings from the interview data are discussed and reflected to the existing literature. Through the discussion, earlier presented research questions are answered. First, the sub-research question is answered as it directs the answer for the main research question. Finally, the main research question is answered.

SRQ. What is the understanding of employee experience in the case company?

Employee experience is a holistic, company specific, personal and social concept, which for the purpose of this study was earlier defined as a sum of employee's individual perceptions of working in a specific organization throughout the employment including all interactions within the organization. Given these attributes, organizations face an increasing need to find out how do their employees perceive employee experience and what are their employee experiences in that specific organization. In the case company, the understanding of employee experience was found to comprise of six elements. These elements can be classified into three distinctive set of conditions, that all together constitute the employee experience: social, physical and personal conditions. The elements are combined to form a holistic framework of employee experience, beginning from the underlying social conditions in the organization. Social conditions are formed by the organizational culture and community, value-based working within the organization and supportive and guiding managers. The second set of conditions, physical conditions, include the premises and tools of organization, which should facilitate the work of all employees. Lastly, employee experience is shaped by employee's own, personal conditions

which consist of the meaningfulness of work and development possibilities as well as the state of employee's holistic work wellbeing. This framework is illustrated in figure 5.

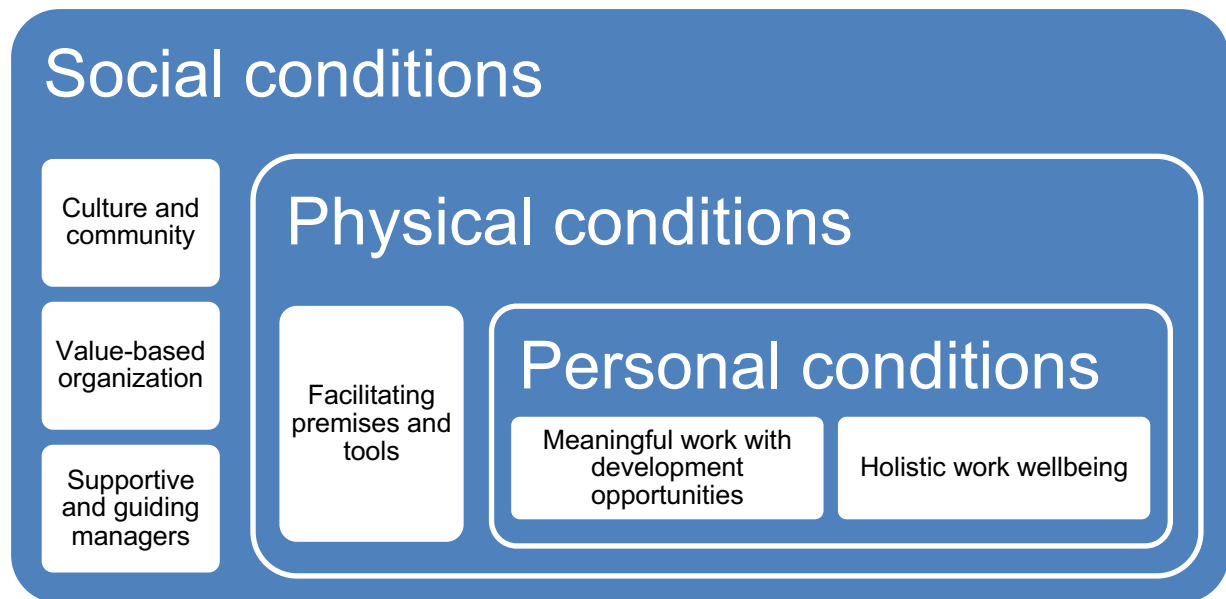


Figure 5. Constituents of employee experience

The framework is aligned with the chosen definition of employee experience, acknowledging all the four identified attributes of employee experience: holisticity, company specificity, personal and social. The interviewees identified tens of occasions, factors and interfaces that all together are part of their employee experience and which were mostly very much linked to one another forming a holistic employee experience. Moreover, most of the interviewees could not name a single factor influencing their employee experience the most as they emphasized the fact how single factors are connected. Company specificity was evident as interviewees pointed out several company attributes, such as the size, its history and the field, in their responses regarding employee experience. Employee experience is inevitably a personal view also in the case company, as all the interviewees described employee experience with their own voice and basing to their own thoughts. The social side of employee experience emerged along the interviewees' descriptions of organizational culture, other employees and managers. Employee experience was seen to be formed in the interactions with other people as well as along other people's actions in the organization.

Employee performs his or her work in the environment of the organization, which constitutes of the social and physical conditions in the framework. Personal conditions in turn, refer to the attributes of job and the state of employee's wellbeing. The framework is in accord with Morgan's (2017) idea of three environments of employee experience by identifying organizational culture and physical working premises and tools as part of employee experience. Even though Morgan (2017) has not separated personal conditions in his theory, he has included wellbeing factors and development opportunities as part of organizational culture. Nevertheless, the interview data indicated that work wellbeing and development opportunities are seen as something that the organization can indeed support or offer, but at the same time as something that employee personally evaluates with respect to the organization. Organizational culture in turn, was seen more as something that is built in the interactions and through the communication together with other members of organization. Based on the interviewees' responses, meaningfulness of work stems from the work attributes, practices and influences and therefore it is seen separately from the organizational culture. However, despite the separation of social, physical and personal conditions, must be noted that all those conditions influence one another and viewing those together is highly reasonable. For example, physical environment can remarkably support employee's wellbeing through ergonomics, lightning and specific sports and relaxation facilities.

Unlike Plaskoff 's (2017) theory suggests, interviewees' accounts concerning employee experience focused only on the touchpoints with one's employer during the employment, ignoring the phases before and after the employment. The research data suggests that interactions with employer, concerning the three types of conditions named above, during the employment, are more important than the experiences in the applicant phase or after ending the employment contract especially after employee has been working for the company for a while. However, it must be noted that all of the interviewees had worked for the case company for more than a year, so they did not have very recent applicant experiences. Neither did they have experiences after employment since they are all still working for the case company.

As discovered earlier in the literature review, employee experience is very reminiscent with a few other, earlier identified concepts. This study confirms that employee experience can be easily mixed with other concepts like job satisfaction and that the concepts include similar elements, which are solely viewed from a slightly different angle. When asked about what

employee experience consists of, the interviewees identified all the same factors, i.e. work situation, physical working environment and responsibility, that Kersley et al. (2006) suggest as the indicators of job satisfaction. Likely due to its convergence with other concepts, employee experience is not yet an established term, at least in the case company, which was agreed with the interviewed HR and communication representatives. However, according to the interviewees, the usage of the concept in the case company is increasing all the time and it was conceived as very essential in terms of an employee choosing to stay in a company.

MRQ. How can internal communication influence employee experiences?

Beside the six identified elements of employee experience discussed above, the interview data indicates that internal communication is a significant part shaping employee experience. Interviewees' responses of their understanding of employee experience implied that internal communication is tied into all of the identified elements. Some of the elements are purely based on communication, including culture, community and supportive and guiding managers, whereas other elements can be enhanced and supported by communication. Organizational culture and the feeling of a community emerge through interaction and communication between organizational members as well as managers transmit their support and instructions for the employee through communication. On the other hand, for example different forms of wellbeing support can be experienced more positively when those are communicated adequately and inspiringly so that employees are aware those and have a positive vision of those.

According to Welch and Jackson (2007), internal corporate communication should create commitment, awareness, belonging and understanding among the employees. The findings from the interviews indicate that fulfilling those four goals of ICC are essential in terms of employee experience. Based on the interviews, ICC could be divided into two dimensions, of which the first one is information sharing, aiming to promote awareness and understanding among the employees. Employees want to feel that they get enough of information in order to perform their work and to satisfy their curiosity in terms of what is happening inside the organization. The demand for information aroused specifically related to strategy, topics across the organization and change initiatives. That is aligned with the purpose of ICC to create "awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims", suggested by Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 186). Even though employees want to receive information widely,

also across the organization, they highly value targeted information. When an organization invests in separating different audiences inside the organization and categorizing ICC content accordingly, it saves employees' time for more relevant and productive work. This will potentially decrease employees' frustration and feelings of overwhelm. Moreover, when information is being shared adequately, the amount of grapevine can potentially decrease. Despite the wish for targeted communication, employees want to have the access for a wide range of information, also to information not particularly relevant for them, so they can increase their knowledge and satisfy the curiosity in case they feel like to do so.

The second dimension of ICC was found to be inspiration of employees, which reflect to the ICC goals of creating commitment and belonging. In the light of the analysis, the inspirational side of ICC refers to communicating about success stories and people working inside the organization as well as management's motivational speeches about organization's direction and purpose. Interviewees experienced that hearing success stories from the organization can empower and inspire them in their own work. Besides, when a company decides to communicate about inspirational and motivating issues instead of purely informative and mandatory issues, it is a sign for employees that they are respected, and the organization wants to invest in communicating them. Moreover, the tone of ICC was found to contribute to the way how employees receive and ICC. Even though ICC often refers to informative communication, adjusting the tone as warm and humane can positively influence the way how employees interpret the messages.

Ultimately, the interviews indicated that more various communication channels could be utilized simultaneously in ICC. That calls for an omni-channel approach, which could be applied for providing a seamless experience. In the case company, intranet was found to be the most used channel in ICC. Yet, interviewees pointed out that the same message could be repeated in several channels which would decrease the chance to miss the information. Earlier presented media richness theory by Daft and Lengel (1984) could be applied in analysing which communication channels should be used in conveying ICC messages. Communication channels of different levels of richness could supplement one another if the ICC content would be adjusted according to the channel's richness.

Philippe, Helping and Koehler (2009) have identified six critical communication areas concerning line manager's communication that influence job satisfaction: feedback from the manager, clarification of company vision, offering justifications for changes, providing information of rewards, differences between manager's communication and other behaviour, and the match between employee's actions and communicated company vision. Findings from the interview data suggest that the above-mentioned communication areas are also determinants of employee experience. As identified earlier in the discussion of sub-research question, in the eyes of employee, job satisfaction and employee experience are determined by several similar factors and are hard to distinguish from one another. Therefore, not surprisingly, the results concerning the connection between line manager communication and employee experience are also convergent with the results indicating line manager communication's influence on job satisfaction.

The most importantly, interviewees saw managers as filters conveying targeted information for the subordinates. Based on the interview data, cross-organization communication was seen as a critical and surprisingly important part of ICC, which at the moment was conceived as insufficient in the case company. However, as Kalla (2005) argues, it is actually a manager who should act as a link between different organizational layers and employees. In order for a manager to filter and pass information and specially to fulfil this aforementioned role as a link, the responsibilities and processes should be carefully planned and coordinated. Thus, manager knows what s/he should communicate and on the other hand, employee can rely on the manager's communication. Moreover, the unwanted situations where employee misses some important information can more likely be avoided.

The findings regarding ideal line manager communication in terms of employee experience are in line with Bass's (1990) description of transformational leadership, which "occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group". In the light of the findings, manager should not only pass information to the subordinates but also ensure the message delivery and understanding in the team level. When employee comprehends the ICC level information, especially concerning company's strategy, it can positively influence to employee's perception of work meaningfulness. Especially in a large organization, where employee might face

difficulties in identifying one's own purpose and contribution to the strategy and mission, manager's support is crucial.

In addition to information sharing, managers were identified to hold an important role as a relationship builder between the manager and the employee. Especially in order to enhance trust and to build a relationship with an employee, managers should be able to adjust their communication as suitable for each employee and to communicate with a "human-to-human" style. Based on a previous study, employees prefer face-to-face communication with their managers and the even if it was used frequently, employees would desire to use it even more (Braun et al., 2019). However, the results of the interviews indicate that employees are more flexible in terms of communication channels and the information, its sufficient amount and the style of communication matter more than manager's channel choice. The preferred channels both in terms of ICC and internal line manager communication varied remarkably among the interviewees, so based on the data it is not possible to conclude any generally preferred channel within the case company.

Lastly, managers were found to lead their subordinates through their communication and to influence the way how his or her subordinates communicate. According to Welch and Jackson (2007), internal communication includes also internal peer communication and internal project peer communication. Even though this study has focused only on internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication, in the light of these findings it can be suggested that manager's communication can influence also those two other dimensions at peer and project peer level. When manager communicates exemplary to his or her subordinate, the subordinate can take inspiration from the manager to one's own communication and spread the good influence among the organization.

Figure 6 summarizes the findings of this thesis regarding how internal communication can influence employee experience and its constituents. Both internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication affect employee experience through the identified elements of employee experience. ICC has two key purposes, information sharing and inspiration of employees. Internal line manager communication is both leading and forming a trusted relationship with subordinates. The overall communicative environment within an organization, concerning both ICC and internal line manager communication, should be open,

but messages targeted enough in order to avoid information overflow. Lastly, the internal communication should convey warmth and a feeling that there is always a human communicating to another human.

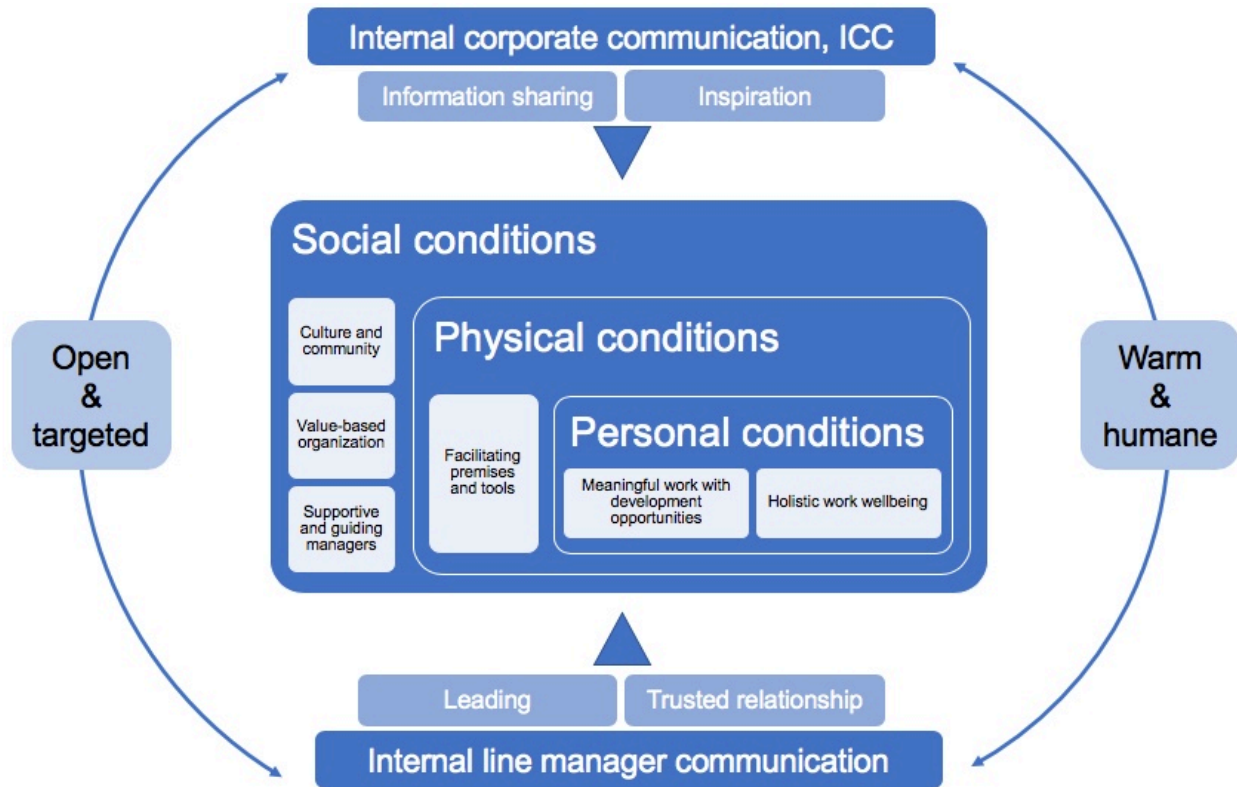


Figure 6. Internal corporate communication (ICC) and internal line manager communication influencing employee experience

5.2 Conclusions

This thesis was motivated by the novelty of employee experience as a concept and the lack of research concerning the concept and its relation to organizational phenomena, including internal communication. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine whether and how internal communication can influence and potentially support employee experiences among an organization. This purpose was directly translated as a main research question of this study. In order to meet the objective of this study, the understanding of employee experience in the case

company was needed to study first, and therefore it was specified as a sub-research question. The research design is a single case study, focusing on employee experience and internal communication in a large, Finnish retail sector company. Interview data was collected by interviewing 11 case company employees.

Theoretical background of this study consisted of two distinctive parts: employee experience and internal communication. Given the novelty of employee experience as a concept and the lack of academic research around it, different understandings of employee experience and its background were discussed, as well as other related concepts were introduced and distinguished from employee experience. Based on the previous conceptualizations of employee experience, for the purpose of this study it was defined as a sum of employee's individual perceptions of working in a specific organization throughout the employment including all interactions within the organization. Internal communication in this study is viewed as a four-dimension entity, of which this study focused on internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication and how those two dimension can influence employee experience.

The findings of this study clarified that in the case company, employee experience is perceived rather similarly as in the previous literature, embodying holistic, company specific, social and personal aspects. In the case company, employee experience is seen as a combination of social, physical and personal conditions. More specifically, social conditions arise from the culture, community and organizational values and from the supportive and guiding managers. Physical conditions refer to the facilities and tools, which should facilitate the work. Personal conditions include the feeling of meaningfulness in one's work combined with development opportunities and employee's state of wellbeing at work. A significant finding is that internal communication influences employee experience through all these aforementioned factors. Culture and the feeling of community originate from the communication and manager's support and guidance is transmitted in the communication whereas other factors require communication towards the employee so that they are aware of those factors and about what the organization has done to support those factors.

Consistent with the previous studies in the field (Plaskoff, 2017; Larivière et al. 2017), this study suggests that employee experience is dependent on the company and its attributes. Therefore, it is crucial to truly understand how employee experience is perceived in an

organization and which factors either weaken or improve the employee experience. The study further suggested that the size of the company has a significant causation to the operations and communication of the organization which further influence the employee experiences of the company's employees.

Regarding the influence of internal communication on employee experience, both internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication may influence employee experience and in particular, both should be viewed as complementing each other. Positive employee experience can be achieved, when the employee receives enough information in order to perform his or her work and to satisfy one's curiosity, gets inspired by the ICC messages, has a trust-based relationship with his or her line manager and is led through effective line manager communication. Communication factors that were found to influence employee experience positively, are convergent with previous studies regarding efficient internal communication (i. e. Meng & Berger, 2012; Grunig, 1992; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Kalla, 2005). Moreover, the findings imply that internal communication influences employee experience similarly as it has an effect on job satisfaction, which was found to be a reminiscent concept to employee experience.

5.3 Managerial implications

One main objective and a managerial purpose of this thesis was to produce practical value and insights of the connection between employee experience and internal communication for the case company management. Regarding the findings of this study, the following issues should be considered when planning internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication in terms of employee experience:

Internal corporate communication, ICC

- Formulate an understandable strategy message, avoiding strategy jargon. Communicate it in multiple channels and engage all managers to strategy communication.
- Identify different organizational layers and plan communication across the different layers including persons in charge.
- Plan a change communication model, which is based on continuous communication.

- Analyse all the employee groups within the organization and their information demand. Target ICC messages accordingly, but keep as much information as possible, available for everyone.
- Find out and measure what kind of messages and stories inspire your employees the most. Bring forth your people with their own voices and faces.
- Choose the ICC channels considering how different channels can supplement one another. Focus on the creation of a seamless communication experience.

Internal line manager communication

- Ask for feedback concerning your communication from your subordinates. Utilize the feedback and create an information sharing process which suits both for you and your subordinates – consider the channels, frequency and targeting.
- Identify critical communication topics, especially concerning organization's strategy and change situations. Consider the needs for information clarification at the team level.
- Analyse your subordinates' personalities and the style of communication. Ponder how they receive your messages and think about what you want to achieve through your communication. Adjust your communication accordingly.
- Pay attention to conveying care, trust and motivation towards your subordinates.

5.4 Direction for future research

This study has approached employee experience and internal communication as influencing employee experience from the case company perspective, acknowledging the specific circumstances of the case company. Therefore, the suggestions for future research are first given specifically for the case company and then more generally.

Given the large and multidisciplinary nature of the case company, which was pointed out throughout the interviews, there are two especially interesting directions for further research within the case company. Firstly, the understanding of employee experience could be studied separately among different groups of employees in the case company. Some interviewees

brought out that due the history of the case company, including several acquisitions and different organizational structures, there are different organizational cultures, procedures and even premises which very likely affect to the employee experiences in different ways. While focusing on a smaller group of employees, more specific results could be accomplished whereas in an organization-wide study, the result are naturally more general. However, it must be noted that even if employees work in a same position and in a same organizational department, their employee experiences cannot be assumed as convergent. Through studying the employee experiences more deeply, the case company could get more specific insights which could help in designing the employee experiences that match with the employee's expectations.

Secondly, as the results indicated, there are several layers of communication inside the case company. The organization is divided into different business areas and further into departments and teams, which arises a need for further research on the state of each communication layer and its influence on the employee experience. This study examined internal corporate communication as a whole, without a specific division into top management communication and department level communication et cetera. Moreover, as research data implied, the demand for cross-organizational communication is high and currently that communication arena is not perceived as abundant and functional enough. Therefore, that area of communication could be studied in order to ensure the functionality and ultimately improve employee experience.

More generally, in the field of management and communications studies, this topic could be also expanded to concern the other dimensions of internal communication than in this study. As Welch and Jackson (2007) identified, besides internal corporate communication and internal line manager communication, there internal peer communication and internal project peer communication that constitute internal communication. This study focused only on the ways how ICC and internal line manager communication can influence employee experiences, but as the different communication dimensions are rather linked to each other, internal communication as an employee experience indicator could be studied more holistically. Alternatively, internal peer and project peer communication could be studied separately, focusing especially on the aspects of informal communication that influence employee experience. Further on, as some interview responses indicated, the external communication of the organization seem to affect to employee experiences. Hence, for example organization's appearance and communication in the social media, could be investigated as an influencer to the employee experience.

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Appendix 1. HR & communication representatives interview agenda

Interviewee background	Interviewee's position, responsibilities and possible previous positions in the case company as well as the length of employment
Employee experience in the case company	Interviewee's own employee experience in the case company
Employee experience in general	Interviewee's ideas of what employee experience consists of and how the notion is currently considered in the case company
Internal communication influencing employee experience	Interviewee's opinions of how internal communication influences employee experience & how HR and communication departments co-operate
Communication with line manager	Interviewee's description of how managers are supported in their communication with subordinates & the goals set for line manager communication
Internal corporate communication	Interviewee's description of the internal corporate communication goals and execution
Employee participation in internal communication	Interviewee's description of employees' possibilities to participate in internal communication, including giving feedback
Internal communication channels	Interviewee's thoughts on different communication channels in different communication purposes, e. g. strategy communication and company culture communication
Improving internal communication	Summarizing the interview by gathering interviewee's ideas on how to improve internal communication in order to support employee experiences

Appendix 2. Employee representatives interview agenda

Interviewee background	Interviewee's position, responsibilities and possible previous positions in the case company as well as the length of employment
Employee experience in the case company	Interviewee's own employee experience in the case company
Employee experience in general	Interviewee's ideas of what employee experience consists of
Internal communication in the case company	Interviewee's description of internal communication in the case company, including challenges
Internal communication influencing employee experience	Interviewee's opinions of how internal communication influences employee experience
Communication with line manager	Interviewee's experiences of communicating with one's own line manager and the importance of line manager communication
Internal corporate communication	Interviewee's description of internal corporate communication and the importance of internal corporate communication
Employee participation in internal communication	Interviewee's experiences of participating in internal communication and possibilities of giving feedback
Internal communication channels	Interviewee's thoughts on different communication channels in different communication purposes, e. g. strategy communication and company culture communication
Communication experiences	Interviewee's descriptions of positive and negative internal communication experiences in the case company
Improving internal communication	Summarizing the interview by gathering interviewee's ideas on how to improve internal communication in order to support employee experiences